# STAN LEE SOUNDS OFF EVERY MONTH IN COMICS FEATURE™

NOW ONLY 1.75 MONTHLY

48432
FEBRUARY 1986
$2.25 CANADA
L1.95 UK DGS
$2.25 Australia

## THE AVENGERS

AN EXCLUSIVE INSIDE LOOK!

**COMICS COLLECTING**
LATEST PRICE TRENDS

**ANIMATION**
DIC—THE FRENCH INVASION

**SIMON & KIRBY**
THE GOLDEN AGE AT DC

**SECRET AGENT X-9**
RON GOULART LOOKS AT DASHELL HAMMETT & ALEX RAYMOND

**DC'S STRANGEST HEROES**
PLUS—THE LATEST UPCOMING COMICS CHECK LIST

02
0 71896 48432

# HAPPY HAL'S HOWLINGS

Just a couple of issues back I was baptized by Mr. Marvel, Stan Lee. Upon joining the magazine he found it necessary to rename me. Accepting this in the spirit that it was meant, I now have a name for my regular feature each month.

Stan has also agreed to act as a regular consultant to **COMICS FEATURE**, something which we quickly took advantage of before he came to his senses. Having spent a marathon session with him (just before heading over to Elvira's for **MONSTERLAND**, by the way), Art Director and Production Manager Bob Lewis, Art Director Jessie Horsting and myself are already filled with ideas. The man is a fountain of energy bursting with exciting ideas.

This column is one of them.

Beginning with this issue I'm going to bring you behind the scenes to learn some things you will find totally boring, unless, of course, you're a real glutton for punishment. You'll meet the bunch of idiots that write the columns and feature articles, the editors and contributing editors and all of the art and production people who put the whole mess together. We'll even show you how we decide on what to cover, make up our minds how we're going to do it and proceed—only to find everything changing as we learn more about the subject, the creators involved and all of that neat stuff. How does a writer decide just what to cover out of the myriad possible topics each issue? How does an artist figure out how he wants a piece to look—and yes, they do have specific goals in mind. How does a designer select which visuals will best illustrate a particular piece? Well, these are some of the things that we hope you will find interesting. If you don't, please don't tell us. . . you don't want to see a grown man cry, do you?

Let's begin with Robert E. Lewis, production manager and art director:

"One key part of an Art Director's job is to make a book look good—with lots of pictures!

Most important in choosing pictures to illustrate an article is knowing how they reproduce.

Anyone who has ever seen a magazine—and we know you have, otherwise you wouldn't be reading this—noticed that the photographs all have dots in them. That's the screen. It's called a halftone.

It's a technique which breaks up the tones in the picture into a dot pattern so that it may be printed. From the solid black areas, through the grays (called middle tones), to the white areas, the photograph becomes a pattern of dots. The darker the area, the larger the dots. There are different qualities of screens, ranging from very coarse to very fine. And, as you've probably guessed, the finer the screen the more detail is retained from the photo. This is a simplified explanation of halftones, but it should give you a basic idea of how it works. Suffice it to say that the type of screen used depends on how and on what it is being printed on. With that technical matter out of the way, we'll move to something much more enjoyable—considerations in selecting the pictures and art to be used. This time out we will concentrate on black & white photographs.

Trust me, this is fun!

If you hold a good quality black & white photo in your hot little mitts, with sharp detail and an acceptable tonal range, run it right over to the camera. This photo will give you a great half-tone. You can even enlarge the picture—within reason, of course. Remember that you are producing a magazine, not wall paper!

Try to stay away from photos which look fuzzy, washed out, muddy, too dark, too light—well, you get the idea. When you screen, some detail from the original is always lost. It is one of those things that you can only try to minimize. If you begin with little detail in the picture, you end up with none in the reproduction. Always try to work from the best photo available, it saves you *embarrassment* when the mag is printed. As the old saying goes: Garbage in, garbage out.

PAGE 20

10¢
CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN
"PRISONERS of ROBOT PLANET!"
ACE IS BEING SHOT OFF INTO OUTER SPACE— AND IT'S OUR TURN NEXT!
THE SILVER AGE
JACOBS AND JONES ON SOME OF THE WEIRDEST HEROES OF THE SILVER AGE FROM D.C.

Now that I've told you this, you will never look at a magazine the same way again. And we will begin receiving letters saying things like: "The picture on page 14 must not have had a good range of middle-tones, because it reproduced muddy." My life will never be the same again. But not to worry, I didn't tell you everything. I had to leave myself a few loopholes through which to escape.

In future issues, when Happy Hal manages to trap me into it again, we'll talk about screening for color photographs, comic book pages, and some of the other things that give Art Directors headaches. We will even touch on adding color to pages, which is sometimes an adventure in itself—especially if the color is wrong in the proof and you're trying to discover who goofed and why, all while hiding from the publisher.

"See, I told you this was going to be fun!"

I'll find you yet, Bob. Only an Art Director could get excited over dot patterns!

# COMICS FEATURE

## columns


**STAN LEE SOUNDS OFF**
The Master of Marvel reminisces about the early days of comic books.
**6**

**GAMES**
Steve Perrin discusses liscensing: how well-known characters from other media find their way into role-playing games.
**10**

**GOLDEN AGE**
Simon & Kirby by Peter Myer & Michael Barson. 'Nuff said!
**12**

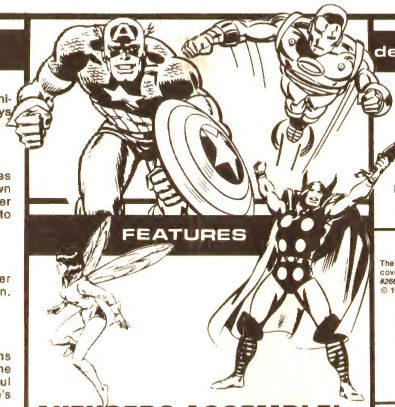
**ANIMATED ANTICS**
"Ah, the French," sighs James Van Hise as he discovers the wonderful world of DIC, the globe's largest cartoon producer.
**16**

**SILVER AGE**
Jacobs and Jones cover DC's second-string heroes of the '50s and '60s.
**20**

**STRIP SEARCH**
How did two of the greatest talents of the Depression era, writer Dashiell Hammett and artist Alex Raymond, create *Secret Agent X-9*? Ron Goulart tells the tale.
**24**

**FUN & PROFIT**
Mike Benton reveals the six stages of comic collecting.
**45**

**HEROES**
Will Murray re-introduces us to an unsung hero of the Silver Age, Brain Boy.
**52**

FEATURES

# AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!

Earth's mightiest heroes, among them Thor, Iron Man, The Hulk, Captain America, Hercules, The Vision, Mantis, Wonder Man, Captain Marvel, Starfox and The Sub-Mariner, have gathered together in this, Marvel's first real team-up title, since the dawn of the Marvel Age. In this exhaustive examination of The Avengers, James Van Hise recaps the group's checkerboard history, examines current and future developments and chats with the editors and writers who make The Avengers come alive.

**26**


*Comics Feature* is published monthly by New Media Publishing, Inc., 8399 Topanga Canyon Blvd., Suite 210, Canoga Park, CA 91304.
This issue, Number 40, January 1986, content is copyright 1986 by New Media Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprint or reproduction in part or in whole without written permission is strictly forbidden. *Comics Feature* accepts no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts, photos, art or other materials, but if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope, submissions will be seriously considered and, if necessary, returned. Products advertised are not necessarily endorsed by *Comics Feature* and any views expressed in editorial copy are not necessarily those of *Comics Feature*. Subscription rates $21.00 for twelve (12) issues in the United States, $27.00 Canada and $33.00 overseas, in U.S. funds only. Printed in Canada. Published under license from Hal Schuster.


## departments


HAL'S HOWLINGS
2
NEWS
4
LISTINGS
38
LETTERS
49
PUBLISHER'S PICKS
36


**ON THE COVER**

The main art appearing on our cover comes from *Avengers* #266. Although modified, it is still © 1985 Marvel Comics Group.

For Advertising Information:
Jack Schuster (818) 340-4170

Cliff Cairns
*Circulation Director*


## staff


Hal Schuster
*Editor/Publisher*

Robert Lewis
*Prod. Mgr./Art Director*

Ron Goulart
Stan Lee
John Peel
James Van Hise
*Contributing Editors*

Robert Strauss
*Asst. Publisher*

Jessie Horsting
James R. Martin
*Asst. Art Director*

Alice Matevosian
Joe Murphy
Joe Rivas
Michael Mayo
*Production Assistants*

Jack Schuster
*President*

# FEATURE NEWS

## AL MILGROM TO TAKE CONTROL OF THE INCREDIBLE HULK

Beginning with **The Incredible Hulk** 320, writer/artist Al Milgrom will control the destiny of the famed green goliath, as John Byrne relinquishes the creative duties of one of Marvel's premiere titles.

"John was doing some very radical things with the series, many of which were creating some of the most intense interest seen in years," Editor in Chief Jim Shooter says. "Al will continue many of the storylines already begun, all the while contributing his own unique, action-oriented style."

Byrne will stay on as the writer/artist for the **Fantastic Four** while working on several other projects, Shooter adds. Byrne is also writing and drawing a Superman series for DC.

Editor Denny O'Neil notes that Milgrom will continue along much the same directions the title was already taking. "Bruce Banner represents the principle of total rationality, while the Hulk is the physical manifestation of the id, that anger and violence so completely repressed in Banner," he explains. "The series will explore and develop the relationship between the two."

Shooter notes that Milgrom is eager to get started on the series. "He's heard so many people say there is nothing new to be done with the Hulk, and he's ready to prove them wrong," he says. "Al believes there is limitless potential for both the Hulk and Bruce Banner, and he plans to make the most of it."

## EPIC IN 1986: NEW SERIES, GRAPHIC NOVELS AND BOLD NEW DIRECTIONS

There are startling developments and surprising twists in store for **Epic Comics** in 1986, with a potpourri of new projects that include **Groo the Wanderer** and **Alien Legion** graphic novels, new artists for existing series, the return of **Elektra** and the debut of America's hardest working hero.

Two new limited series will debut in late spring and early summer, beginning with **Steelgrip Starkey**, America's hardest working hero. Created and written by Alan Weiss, the six-issue series will be penciled by Alan, James Sherman and Val Mayerik, with inking and coloring by Sherman.

Then **Elektra: Assassin**, an eight-issue series, follows closely on the heels of the **Elektra** graphic novel by Frank Miller. **Elektra: Assassin** will be written by Miller and illustrated in full color by Bill Sienkiewicz, starring the popular heroine from the pages of **Daredevil**.

**Groo the Wanderer** hacks and slashes his way into a full-length graphic novel next summer in "The Death of Groo," written by Mark Evanier and illustrated by Groo creator Sergio Aragones. "The novel has a shock beginning, then from there Groo does what Groo does best—kills all the wrong people and sinks ships," Managing Editor Jo Duffy explains. "It's pure Groo from the word 'go.'"

The original art team of penciller Frank Cirocco and inker Terry Austin return to join writer Alan Zelenetz on the **Alien Legion** graphic novel next fall. Readers face the death of a legionnaire even as Sarigar must face the difference between his ideal of the Legion and harsh reality.

Cirocco, for years a favorite artist in science fiction fandom, and Austin, one of the most popular artists in comics, pull out all the stops and lavishly produce each and every page of the **Alien Legion** novel in full, painted illustration.

Meanwhile, in the bimonthly **Alien Legion** Epic Comics series, penciller Larry Stroman and inker Randy Emberlin lend their own distinctive styles to the ongoing Legion adventures. Beginning with issue 13, the Legionnaires will embark on a

series of missions that will take them to a wide variety of worlds across the backwash of the galaxy.

Geoff Isherwood, well-known for his intricate work on **Conan the King** and **The Revenge of the Living Monolith**, joins Bill Mantlo on **Swords of the Swashbucklers** with issue 5. Rayder, Domino and crew finally return to Earth, and the war between Haven and the Colonizers reaches its cataclysmic conclusion with issue 6.

Jim Sherman isn't limiting himself to **Steelgrip Sharkey** these days. Sherman will pencil, ink and color **Dreadstar** 24, written by series creator Jim Starlin. As the "Hunt" storyline draws to a close, Vanth Dreadstar's band of allies is being picked off, one by one, including Dreadstar himself. It's up to Willow to save them.

After a three-month break between **Moonshadow** 6 & 7 (to allow Jay Muth time to wrap up his **Dracula** graphic novel), Moonshadow, Ira and Frodo return. Forced out of the only peaceful home he's found in his galactic wanderings, Moonshadow is faced by a vision of Ira in dire trouble, and must rush to the rescue of his greatest friend. Issue 7 will be on sale early in February.

"Things are shaping up for our busiest year yet," Duffy comments. "We haven't even mentioned **The Last Galactus Story** special, or any of the other new projects in the works. It's going to be an Epic boom, starting immediately."

# DC COMICS ANNOUNCES PLANS FOR 1986

DC comics will bring Superman back into the limelight in 1986 with a complete re-vamping of the "Superman line" of **Superman**, **Action Comics** and **DC Comics Presents**.

Comics fan favorite John Byrne has signed a contract to write and pencil **Superman**, which will have a new title and begin a new numbering system with John Byrne's first issue, scheduled to ship in the summer of 1986. "We're delighted to have John aboard," announces Vice President-Executive Editor Dick Giordano. "Byrne's enormous talents and his loyal following will be crucial factors in helping DC Comics re-vamp the legendary comics hero. And by beginning the series with issue 1, we can attract collectors who are put off by **Superman**'s current numbering in the 400s."

John Byrne is just one of the many talented people recently approached to re-vamp the "Superman line" of comics. Andrew Helfer, who will edit the line, is enthusiastic about the possibilities. "It's too early to say how the entire Superman line will be affected," notes Helfer. "We've been talking to folks who are currently working for DC Comics as well as many who aren't. Superman is a difficult character to work on. He's the very foundation of all comics, really—after all, **Action Comics** has been around since the very beginning. Almost everyone wants to write or draw him—the problem is finding the people who can return Superman to the stature he deserves."

Former "Superman line" editor Julius Schwartz is hard at work editing DC's recently inaugurated line of science fiction graphic novels. His previous experience as a literary agent has helped bring in classic works by Frederik Pohl, Larry Niven and Harlan Ellison, all of which are scheduled to be published in 1986.

In addition to the science fiction graphic novels, the DC Comics publishing schedule for 1986 includes both new ongoing monthly series and new limited issue series for the direct sales market. "You know that old phrase, 'We're only 50 years young'?" notes Giordano. "Well, that's about how we feel. Our 51st year of publishing will be as refreshing and innovative as our first!"

Other projects planned for 1986 are:

**Electric Warrior**, an ongoing direct-only monthly series written by Doug Moench, pencilled and inked by Scotland's Jim Baikie. This science fiction series includes mutants, punks, primitives and a technocratic ruling class in a world in which robotic policemen dispense street corner justice.

**The Last Days of the Justice Society of America:** The first graphic novel in DC Comics' line of books based on DC characters. The book is written by Roy Thomas, pencilled by David Ross and inked by Mike Gustovich.

**The Legend of Wonder Woman:** a four-issue miniseries written by Kurt Busiek with Trina Robbins. Trina also illustrates this limited series of classic Wonder Woman-type tales that bridges the gap between the cancellation of the previous **Wonder Woman** title and the start of the new series later in 1986.

**The Shadow:** a four-issue miniseries written and illustrated by **American Flagg!** creator Howard Chaykin. In his only recent series for DC Comics, Howard depicts the 1930s pulp hero as he's never been seen before.

**The Merchants of Venus:** Number three in the science fiction graphic novel line is an adaptation of Frederik Pohl's classic story. The adaptation is by V. Peterson with art by Neal McPheeters.

**Blue Beetle:** An ongoing series written by Len Wein and illustrated by Paris Cullins. This is the first of the heroes acquired from Charlton to win his own series.

**The Dark Knight:** a four-issue series written and pencilled by Frank Miller, inked by Klaus Janson and colored by Lynn Varley. This $2.95 deluxe, perfect-bound series will show Batman forced out of retirement some ten years after his last crusade.

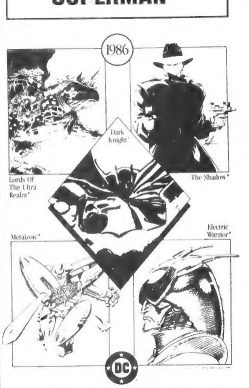
**Lords of the Ultra Realm:** A six-issue deluxe series for the direct-sales market, written by Doug Moench and illustrated by Pat Broderick. Hero Michael Savage is thrust into the fantastic world of extremes among characters who are either completely good or completely evil.

**Ambush Bug:** A six-issue mini-series continuing the zany creation of writer Bob Fleming and penciller Keith Giffen, aided and abetted by inker Bob Oksner.

**Metalzoic:** A futuristic graphic novel original written by Pat Mills and illustrated by Kevin O'Neill.

DC says it's still too early to divulge any details, but also upcoming are:

## JOHN BYRNE TO TACKLE SUPERMAN




**Demon With A Glass Hand:** an adaptation of Harlan Ellison's teleplay, illustrated by Marshall Rogers; **Hawkman:** an ongoing monthly series written by Tony Isabella and pencilled by Rich Howell; **Teen Titans Spotlight:** highlighting various Teen Titans characters, Marv Wolfman and various artists; **Watchmen:** a 12-issue maxi-series written by Alan Moore and illustrated by Dave Gibbons posing the question "What if comic book heroes were real?"; **History Of The DC Universe:** a three issue series by Marv Wolfman and George Perez; **Sandkings:** a graphic novel adaptation from a George R.R. Martin story, adapted by Doug Moench and Pat Broderick; **Lois Lane:** four issue mini-series on missing children written by Mindy Newell and illustrated by Gray Morrow.

# STAN LEE SOUNDS OFF

## GREETINGS, FRANTIC ONES.

I was hoping you'd join me again, 'cause I wanna try something a little bit different this time.

You're invited to come back a few years with me, back to the dim, vaguely-remembered past, back to those hysterical, slap-happy days of yore when I unleashed a *Stan's Soapbox* column on our defenseless legion of maniacal Marvelites each and every issue.

How I loved those columns! They gave me a chance to ventilate my opinions on any topic near to my heart. Even the ones that were far from my heart; I was an equal opportunity writer.

"The main difference between comics before Marvel and now is . . ."

The purpose of this month's little exercise in erudition is to re-examine a subject which probably received more interest than any other whenever it came up in the Soapbox.

By now, your mouth is supposed to be watering as you tremulously sit on the edge of your seat, waiting with bated breath to learn what it is that I'll by layin' on you for the next couple of pages. (By the way, speaking of bated breaths, does anyone actually know the correct way a breath should be bated? Have you ever seen anybody bate one? Would you recognize a bated breath if it stood next to an unbated one? Perhaps my next column should deal with cliches. But, forgive me, I digress.)

The subject at hand is an important one for every reader of *COMICS FEATURE*. You bought this magazine because you're interested in comic books, right? Okay, then let's talk about comic books. I don't mean any particular comic book. I mean comic books, period. The whole world of comic books. What they were years ago, what they are now, and what they're gonna be.

In the dim, dark past, before Marvel Comics was Marvel Comics, if you can even imagine such a culturally deprived era, comic books were somewhat different than they are today. How were they different? Thought you'd never ask.

The main difference between comic books B.M. (Before Marvel) and now is that they used to be written for and read by the *very* youngest kids. Basically, they had the same audience that today's Saturday morning animated cartoons have. We're talking toddlers.

Also, in those early days (the late 1930s till the '50s), the plots were mostly simplistic, formularized and hokey. You've heard of the famous all-purpose romance story plot—boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl. Well, the old-time superhero stories weren't that much different. Hero meets villain, hero battles villain, hero beats villain. Come to think of it, in those days that was one of the more sophisticated types!

And what about the dialogue? Here's a sample of the way we were writing those mixed-up masterpieces a few decades ago.

A script might call for the hero seeing a monster lumbering down the street. Our hero would throw out his chest, square his shoulders, clench his fists and fearlessly cry out, "A Monster! I've got to defeat him before he destroys the Earth!"

Of course, all the dialogue wasn't the same. Sometimes our hero would shout, "I've got to defeat him before he destroys mankind!" Or, "—before he destroys the city!" Or, "—The neighborhood!" Or, "—68th Street!" Hey, you get the idea. But, just in case you don't, here's another example. . .

Our hero is relaxing at home, perusing the latest issue of *How to Speak Swahili in One Easy Lesson* while listening to the radio. Suddenly, he hears a news bulletin. "The Federal National Bank has just been robbed!"

Instantly, he tosses away his book, tears off his shirt, puts on his gaudy-colored tutu and shouts to no one in particular, "That can only be the work of Dr. Nefarious! This is a case for the Awesome Avenger!"

(Hey, that's not a bad name. Don't try to

## STAN LEE SOUNDS OFF

**COMIC BOOKS HAVE COME OF AGE**

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
12¢
Fantastic
FOUR
4
HERE!... DOCTOR DOOM!
WITH A TURN OF THE DIAL, I SHALL DESTROY THE FOUR FOREVER!!
I'VE GOT TO GET HELP! HE'S BEEN HURT BY THE STRANGE RADIATION!
ALICIA! QUICK! WHAT'S HAPPENED?
MY FLAME IS GONE! WITHOUT IT I'M HELPLESS!
I'M SORRY, JOHNNY! I'VE TRIED, BUT MORE THAN I CAN!

© 1965 Marvel Comics Group

beat me to it. By the time this article sees print, I'll have already copyrighted "Awesome Avenger"!)

Oh, I forgot to mention another vitally important detail. In the olden days of comics, almost every superhero had to have a teenage sidekick. Whether it was Batman's Robin, or Captain America's Bucky, or Superman's Jimmy Olsen, a superhero somehow just didn't seem complete without his loyal, cheerful, faithful, humorous, devoted, always-getting-into-trouble little sidekick.

Come to think of it, here's an odd bit of addenda for you. Have you ever noticed that Western movies were just the opposite? In almost all of the old oaters, the hero's inevitable sidekick wasn't a fresh-faced youngster but rather a grizzled older man. Remember Gabby Hayes? That's something for psychologists to mull over in the future. Why did superheroes continually opt for teenagers while cowboy stars' sidekicks were always just this side of senility?

Come to think of it, I wonder what the derivation of the world "sidekick" is, anyway. Was it because one cowboy's foot would kick the other's on the side when they rode along? A shiny new No-Prize for anyone who can furnish the answer.

Now, back to reality.

Remember the vocabulary in the old-time comic books? During those early days, any word of more than two syllables was a no-no. Again I remind you, we were writing for the diaper brigade.

By the way, don't get the idea that I'm smugly criticizing the other guys. Ol' Stan wrote as much of that stuff as anyone, maybe more. We just didn't know any better. It's what we were told to write by our publishers. "Sorry, mein herr. Ve vas chust carrying out orders!"

Of course, even in those days there were the talents that stood out from the rest, the writers and artists whose quality transcended the banality of the medium. There were creative forces like Harvey Kurtzman, Will Elsner, Simon and Kirby, Al Feldstein, Bill Everett, Charles Biro and Milton Caniff, to name just a few. (Even though Caniff wasn't a comic book creator per se, he exerted a tremendous influence over the entire field).

What I'm really trying to emphasize is, it wasn't lack of talent that made most old-time comic books so banal. It was simply the rules under which the artists and writers had to work, rules laid down by the publishers who, for the most part, perceived their audience as being both infantile and unselective.

And there you have the primary reason why most parents and educators weren't too happy about children reading comic books. Comics were generally thought of as being the bottom rung of the cultural totem pole. (Though they probably would never have dared to mix a metaphor the way I just did!)

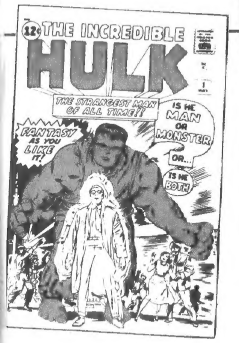
Now then, having laid such a heavy rap on the comic books of yore, let me add one more thing. The kids who read them loved 'em! They were exciting, they were imaginative and best of all—they were fun! Sometimes sloppily written and carelessly edited as they might have been, they nonetheless opened up new vistas for their wide-eyed readers. They enabled generations of kids to stretch their imaginations and expand their horizons.

Yep, for all their faults, they were still pretty damn good!

But look what's happened since then.

Today, stories written by some of our finest contemporary writers are being published in comics form. The work of some of the most highly-acclaimed illustrators of our time can be found in the pages of comic books. Certain issues of comics bring astronomical prices in the collectors' market. Many comic book artists and writers have gained fame, fortune and fan followings that many a struggling playwright, novelist or screenwriter would die for. Colleges throughout the nation offer courses dealing with The Art of Comic Books. Comic Book heroes have been successfully brought to the screen in big-budget films and tv series, with many more

# STAN LEE SOUNDS OFF



© 1965 Marvel Comics Group

In preparation.

In short, and you better believe it, baby—comic books have come of age!

When did it happen? How did it happen? Why did it happen?

Thanks for asking. I'd like to think that it all began with the advent of Marvel Comics. (Hoo boy! Will this bring a flood of letters from outraged fans of our competitors!)

Cases in point: It was Marvel that first started using college-level vocabulary in its mags. It was Marvel that insisted intelligent, realistic characterization was vitally important in every story, no matter how fantastic or far-fetched the basic plot might be. It was Marvel that first featured continued storylines in all its titles, thus enabling us to develope more complex plots due to the fact that we had more pages to work with per story. It was Marvel that first introduced the notion of one universe in which all its heroes dwelled, thus allowing us to mix and match our characters, having any or all of them pop up in anyone else's stories. It was Marvel that practically trademarked the concept of realism mixed with fantasy. Our characters existed in the real world—in New York City rather than Gotham or Metropolis; they lived in real neighborhoods, Greenwich Village or Forest Hills, or they had their headquarters on Manhatten's Fifth Avenue facing Central Park, rather than on Main Street in Centerville or Anytown. They drove Corvettes and Thunderbirds rather than Whizbang Eight's; they saw movies at the Radio City Music Hall or Lowe's Paradise rather than the ubiquitous Bijou. It was Marvel that decided its characters should be fallible and should have all the problems and concerns that every other human being is heir to. Thus, Marvel first gave the world heroes who had to worry about paying their rent, who occasionally fumbled and failed, who might have weak hearts or ailing relatives and who might themselves be unattractive, troubled or unloved.

I could continue with many other examples, but since I'm not being paid by the word, I'll assume you get the idea.

So where are we today?

Now it's a whole new ballgame. Comic books are read by people of every age, from every walk of life. Some titles cost as much as hard-cover novels, and many sell more copies than best-selling novels. But this is only the start of it.

Hang on. I'm about to make a prediction.

I predict that, before the end of this century, comic books will be reviewed in the newspapers the way movies and tv shows are today. I predict that top comic book artists and writers will be as famous and as acclaimed as any novelists, screen stars or directors are today. I predict that the public will see nothing more unusual about a doctor, lawyer, housewife or indian chief carrying a comic book than if he or she was to be seen with a copy of Time Magazine.

And I predict that I'd better sign off now before I get carried away and start predicting that one day a comic book creator will will a Nobel Prize. What's the point? With my luck, they'd probably spell my name wrong!

So, till Howard the Duck elopes with Wonder Woman, this is Stan Lee threatening to see you again next ish.

Excelsior!

P.S.: If you can stand the suspense, next month I'll tell you which topic most of your letters requested me to write about. (I wont mention the others that told me to shaddup awreddy!)

# Games

BY STEVE PERRIN

One of the biggest potential sources of income for beleagured companies is licensing. By hopping on the bandwagon of a proven media winner, a game company can rake in the money of fanatic fans.

Licensed games are often just a jumble of rules and familiar pretty pictures—with no real attempt to make a good product. The assumption by some companies seems to be that as long as the game has the right name and pictures, no one will care how it plays. Other companies, including Chaosium Inc., make a point of putting out the best game possible no matter the subject. They choose to maintain a good reputation and create games which will bring gamers back for more.

It seems to be a tossup as to which is the best strategy for sales. After all, many buyers simply want to own something connected to their hero and care little about playing the game. Yet, if your company gets a reputation for doing cheap ripoffs to make money, you don't build a long-term clientele.

The very first role-playing game company to use licensing was TSR, makers of D & D, who parlayed founder Gary Gygax's acquaintanceship with fantasy writer Fritz Leiber into a low quality *Lankhmar* board game. (This should not be confused with TSR's current *Lankhmar* AD&D supplement, which will be up for review at a later date.)

Chaosium Inc. was also one of the first to use licensing, and has done well with *Stormbringer*, *Elfquest* and *Call of Cthulhu* games, garnering far more critical accolades and gamer support than the TSR entry.

TSR, of course, also has the licenses for *Marvel Super Heroes* and *Indiana Jones*, and managed to forcefeed versions of *2001* and *2010* into the mold of their *Star Frontiers* game.

One of the most active current licensors is Mayfair Games. Besides board games based on recent science fiction masterworks such as Joe Haldeman's **Forever War** and Anne McCaffrey's **Dragonflight** they snared the laurels for producing *DC Heroes*. This excellent package is already suffering from a lack of backup material. Their ambitious one-item-a-month schedule has, as of this writing, managed to produce only one scenario (*Seige*—reviewed here last month).

Mayfair *has* announced four more adventures to be used with their *DC Heroes* game: *Blood Feud*—featuring the Teen Titans vs the Brotherhood of Evil versus Brother Blood; *Batman*—a 96-page look at all the facets of the Caped Crusader and 4 adventures; *Wheel of Destruction*—a 32 page Batman versus the Joker adventure; and *Project Prometheus*—32 page adventure for any heroes featuring a gang of Crete-based villains. As of this writing, none have appeared.

The current king of licensed role-playing adventure games is FASA.

FASA scored a coup by capturing the role-playing rights to *Star Trek*. In the two or so years since they obtained the license, FASA has managed to support it with

# DENIZENS OF TSR'S MARVEL GAMING UNIVERSE

many supplements. They also produce a line of metal starship models and *Star Trek* personality figures.

Not content with catching the Trekker population, FASA has recently moved on to *Dr. Who* and *Masters of the Universe*. The *Dr. Who* game is already a good seller with several supplements of varying quality. *Dr. Who* will be covered in a future column.

### MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE

For those of you who haven't been following tv animation, and who don't check out the toy shelves, *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* is an adventure cartoon show which pits the stalwart He-Man and a variety of sidekicks against the evil, and rightly-named, Skeletor. It all takes place in the fantasy world of Eternia. The protagonists spend a lot of time doing incredible amounts of damage which never seems to hurt anyone. This, of course, is all in accord with the current dictates of the Saturday morning cartooning censors.

Apparently deciding that simple text would be inadequate for explaining the game rules to potential buyers, FASA enlisted the aid of First Comics to do a comic book illustrating the rules of the game. It's an intriguing concept that several other companies have contemplated at various times, but balked at paying the art bill for.

The artists are familiar to anyone who keeps track of such things among the alternate comics. Hilary Barta, Doug Rice (artist on the new Dynamo Joe feature in *First Adventures*), Willie Schubert and Rick Taylor all contribute work—which is up to the standard of the tv animation.

Unfortunately, no one seems to have coordinated the artwork between the rule book and the die-cut counters provided for play. According to the illustrations in the rule book, the Plamydon is a gigantic worm-thing. The counter shows it as a sort of ski-legged lump. The Gorman is a classic reptile-man in the comic, but the counter gives him wings... Oops.

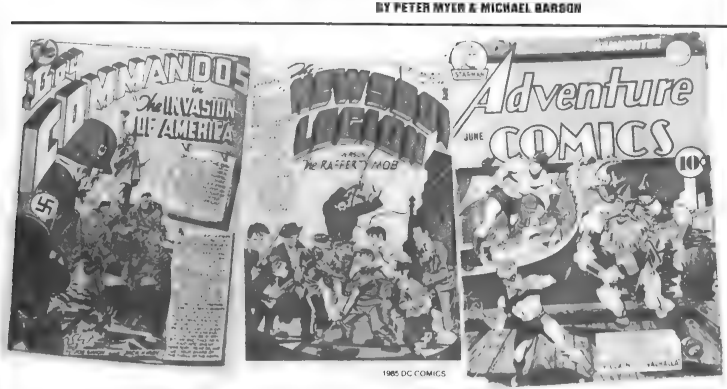
This is what comes of having First produce the rule book but FASA produce the counters.

Despite its claim to being a role-playing game, *Masters of the Universe* is actually a board game. It is reminiscent of *Citadel*, a game put out many years ago by Fantasy Games Unlimited. One or more players play He-Man and his compatriots. Skeletor has stolen the Crown Jewels of Eternia and He-Man and company must go into Skeletor's hideout in Snake Mountain and get them back. Like most role-playing games, there is no rivalry among the player characters. The entire group is playing against the game.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 40

# LOOKING BACK ON THE GOLDEN AGE

BY PETER MYER & MICHAEL BARSON




In the early 1940s, most comic book writers and artists were either anonymous (because they didn't use their real names in signing the stories) or unknown (because no one paid any attention even when they *did* sign their real names). Such was not the case with Joe Simon and Jack Kirby. Beginning with their work on *Blue Bolt*, both names were prominently displayed by the fifth issue. Their move to Timely in 1941 saw more of the "star billing" that was already setting the team apart from the rest of comicdom. But even with as popular a character as Captain America—who would, with Superman and Batman, form one of the "big three" superhero characters of the 1940s—Simon & Kirby must have been chafing at a certain lack of recognition (read: money and creative control) from Timely publisher Martin Goodman. Hardly had *Captain America* hit its stride than the team was negotiating with DC Publications—the MGM of the comic book world—to create an entire new stable of characters. S & K's last issue of Cap, number ten, was dated January, 1942. By March their work would be appearing exclusively at DC, with their names above the titles—an unprecendented concession from a publisher of comic books. (It's done today as a matter of course, for work so inferior that one wonders how the writers and artists have the courage to give their real names at all.)

Of course, it does no good to have your names above the title unless your work delivers. Simon & Kirby's did. Their vivid layouts redefined the conventions of the comic book page, creating new boundaries that suggested *un*bounded possibilities of space and time. (A testament to their impact is demonstrated by the post-S&K *Captain America*, which continued using their style as closely as possible for years after the team's departure.) But artwork was not the only innovation Simon & Kirby brought to the comic books of the 1940s. With *The Young Allies* at Timely, they had introduced the concept of the "kid gang" to the field, by extending the concept of the boy sidekick to its logical conclusion: a whole feature about boy sidekicks. Two of the four features they created for DC in 1942 revolved around kid gangs: The Newsboy Legion (with a little help from The Guardian, a scaled-down Cap) in *Star Spangled Comics* number seven (April 1942) and The Boy Commandos, oddly situated in *Detective Comics* beginning with issue number 64 (June 1942). Unlike The Young Allies, these kid gangs had no super powers. The Newsboy Legion earned the cover spot on **Star Spangled** immediately (with no competition elsewhere in the mag); The Boy Commandos could not wrest the cover away from Batman (except for a token slot on number 65), but quickly earned their own quarterly title to accompany their pages in *Detective*.

## CAP CLONES

The other features Simon & Kirby brought to DC spun off the Captain America archetype: lean, athletic figures in tight, bright costumes. The Manhunter appeared in *Adventure Comics* number 73 (April 1942), while The Sandman debuted in issue number 72 of the same magazine. Actually, "debuted" is not the correct term, as both of these characters existed previously as DC characters—at least in name. The Sandman had been around since **Adventure** number 40 in 1939, making him one of DC's original superheroes (if a guy wearing a gas-mask and a cape can be considered "super"), while a plainclothes Manhunter had been introduced over a year before the S & K version. Manhunter was featured on three covers on *Adven-*

# SIMON & KIRBY — THE DC YEARS

© 1985 DC COMICS

**The Golden Age artwork of Simon & Kirby redefined the conventions of the comic book page. But artwork was not their only innovation.**

*ture*, numbers 73, 78 (a nice team-up with Sandman and Sandy, his kid sidekick) and 79, arguably one of the most powerful covers of the Golden Age, with a giant figure of Manhunter stalking a German submarine. S & K handled his stories for eight issues, numbers 73 through 80, handing the art chores over to other less talented artists for numbers 81 through 92. The Sandman probably was the more popular character of the two (deservedly so, since his powers were more original), earning covers on *Adventure* numbers 74 through 97 (excepting numbers 79, 100 and 102). His stories were handled by Simon & Kirby for the early numbers, again being transferred to others after a time. (S & K would often do a cover and a splash page with a signature, just as they had with much of their work on *Captain America* in 1941.) The Sandman also was invited to participate in four adventures of the Justice Society of America, as recorded in *All Star* numbers 14 through 17 and 19, along with a *World's Finest* or two.

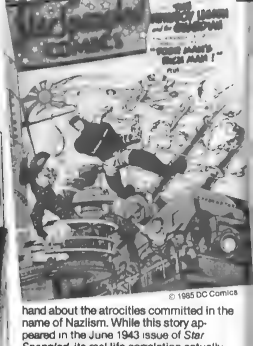
## MYTHS

The recognition that Simon & Kirby received on the covers of their books indicated that the comic book buyers of the day responded to the storytelling techniques and characters invented by the team. It is worth noting that certain *kinds* of stories were favored by S & K, themes that would continue to appear in their work long after they left DC to create their own new titles. One of these recurring themes involved mythological characters. The roots for Kirby's Thor in the '60s can be seen in a story such as "The Villain from Valhalla" in *Adventure* number 75 (June 1942). Here we have Sandman and Sandy pitted against a bearded, red-haired Thor, complete with a magic hammer named Mjolnir. It turns out that this would-be Norseman is Fairy Tales Fenton in disguise, a very mortal crook, but you can see what S & K were getting at. Of course, the very premise of the Sandman strip was that the world of dreams could be dealt with as a tangible reality, and many imaginative variations on this theme were played in such stories as "Dreams of Doom," "A Dream of Dreams," "Prisoner of His Dreams," "The Man Who Couldn't Sleep" and "The Unholy Dreams of Gentleman Jack." Other figures from mythology popped up in Boy Commandos stories including "The Siege of Troy" (*BC* number three, which incidentally featured the only centerspread S & K did for DC, despite their standard use of centerspreads in *Captain America* numbers six through ten), "Sleeping Beauty" (*BC* number two) and "The Knights Wore Khaki." During the 1950s, S & K would attempt to turn their fascination with mythology and dreams into books that *didn't* rely on costumed heroes—*The Strange World of Your Dreams* and *Black Magic*—but the formula didn't work as well again until Kirby's 1960s work at Marvel.

## AND REALITY

The other motif that was frequently employed in S & K's work for DC during this golden period was the use of actual news events as the basis for stories. One of the most dramatic examples of this device can be found in the Newsboy Legion story, "The House Where Time Stood Still." Here we find two elderly brothers who have been living like hermits in an old mansion in the heart of the city. The Newsboy Legion breaks into the place in order to peddle some war bonds and are turned away by the old recluses. Later the old men change their minds when they learn first-

**Simon and Kirby repeated their earlier success with Captain America in such characters as The Guardian, Sandman and Manhunter**

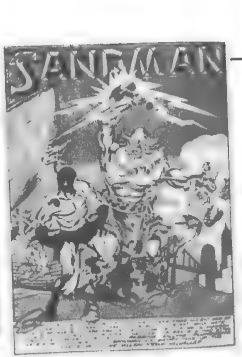


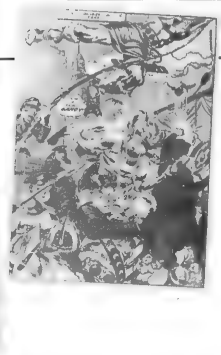

© 1985 DC Comics

hand about the atrocities committed in the name of Nazism. While this story appeared in the June 1943 issue of *Star Spangled*, its real-life correlation actually didn't appear in the newspapers for another four years, when it was reported that two brothers named Collyer were living in a strange mansion in the heart of New York City, where they had spent the last twenty years in a hermit-like existence. Their story was revealed only when a tip sent the police to the mansion, where upon breaking in they found the brothers dead amidst a mass of clutter and debris. Prophecy? Or had S & K somehow heard of these strange brothers through the grapevine? (Interestingly, Will Eisner also used the Collyer brothers as the basis for a Spirit story that was published on June 22, 1947.)

A less eerie use of real-life events was the premise of "The Saga of the Little Tin Box" in *Detective* number 73. Here we see the Boy Commandos engaged in an all-out effort to save a little tin box from the enemy. After several life-threatening encounters the contents of the box are revealed: scrap tin-foil wrappers that the Commandos were bringing back for the salvage scrap-drive in the U.S. The kids who read *Detective* comics were likely to have themselves participated in a scrap drive here at home.

Even the name "commandos" had its basis in recent events. Less than a year before the Boy Commandos made their first appearance, the British Commando forces were organized under Sir Roger Keyes.



© 1985 DC COMICS

Winston Churchill had given the name of "commandos" to these volunteer units after the Dutch forces who fought in the Boer Wars years earlier.

Simon & Kirby's uncanny sense of timing was also in evidence in the Boy Commandos story "Escape to Disaster" (*Detective* number 67). An attack on a submarine base forms the premise of this tale, just months after the March 1942 attack on a sub base in St. Nazaire was reported in the papers. When the story was published in August of 1942, it coincided with a commando raid on Dieppe that took place on August 19 that followed virtually the same pattern. The September 1943 issue of *Detective* offered a story entitled "Fury Rides a Taxicab," in which a 70-ton German tank is stolen by an ex-cab driver. Such tanks didn't actually appear on the battlefields of Europe until a year later. Did S & K employ a spy network to feed them prophetic plots?

The September issue of 1943 told a story about a commando attack on the Italians that appeared at exactly the time that we were invading Sicily and Italy. In *Boy Commando Comics* number four, subtitled "Invasion Issue" and dated September 1943, the actual June 1944 invasion is chronicled. One intriguing parallel was a story about the Boy Commando, Jan, whose parachute became snagged in a tree when he landed. Though wounded and apparently lifeless, he lands in full view of the Germans until he is rescued by the French resistance. During the actual invasion nine months later an American paratrooper did snag his parachute on a church steeple, was wounded and did hang apparently lifeless in full view of the Germans below until he was later rescued. In *World's Finest* number nine, which appeared in the Spring of 1943, a full year before the invasion, the Boy Commandos story depicted the use of dummy parachutists to distract the Germans, a ploy that was actually used during the Normandy invasion in 1944. Realizing that Simon and Kirby were creating these yarns about four to six months before they appeared on the stands makes these parallels and prophecies all the more interesting.

## MOVIE INFLUENCE

The final recurring motif that one can see in the team's work for DC in this period is their use of the day's popular films and literature for story elements. The film of James Hilton's novel *Lost Horizon* was the obvious basis for the story "The Valley of Destiny" in *Detective* number 77. In this story, a totally peaceful society is shown confronting the violence of WWII—an isolated community that also happened to utilize atomic energy as its primary source of power. Date of story: July 1943, two years before the real age of atomic power exploded at Hiroshima. Even the first Boy Commandos tale (*Detective* number 64) invoked several references to Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*—including a character named La Farge—which had been a popular film from the MGM studios in 1935. (S & K had dipped into similar source material while at Timely in stories like "The Hunchback of Hollywood" in *Cap* number three and "The Phantom Hound of Cardiff Manor" in *Cap* number ten, both based on films that appeared in 1939.)

The golden age of Simon & Kirby at DC really lasted for just a couple of years. Although Kirby returned to the company following his war service for work on *Adventure* and *Star Spangled*, the interior stories were never again given full attention by the team (even when signed). They did turn in some excellent covers in 1945, but the prospect of starting their own company and having full creative control was just too tempting, and the team left DC in 1946 to turn out new projects under the Crestwood and Harvey banners. (Much later, in 1957, Kirby would return alone to DC to create the popular *Challengers of the Unknown* title, as well as less memorable Green Arrow and mystery stories.) These marvellous collaborators had much good work left in their pens and typewriters, but were they ever able to match the glorious output of those two years at DC?—more than 80 covers and over 1100 pages of art and stories? It's a legacy that may well be unmatched in the history of the comic book field. CF

# Animated Antics

**THE LITTLES is based on Scholastic Books characters.**

"We are a French based company," says DIC president Andy Heyward, "but our main operation is in Los Angeles. Here we do the creation of the shows, the scripts, model sheets, voice recordings, the timings and the layouts. Then we ship the shows out to our studios in Tokyo for animation work."

DIC Enterprises entered the American animation arena in 1982. Since then, the company has captured a good share of the market by producing **The Littles, Pole Position, The Get Along Gang, Kidd Video, Kissyfur** and **Hulk Hogan's Rock 'N' Wrestling** for network airing as well as several made-for-syndication packages including **Cats & Company, Inspector Gadget, Joyce of the Wheeled Warriors** and **M.A.S.K.**

The DIC Group was founded in Paris in 1976, with Jean Chalopin a one-third owner. In 1982 they opened an office in Studio City (recently) relocated to larger quarters in Encino). In three years time, DIC has shown itself to be an operation with a handle on what's popular and commercially successful in animation.

DIC Enterprises president Andy Heyward worked for Hanna-Barbera from 1976-80 as a writer, story editor and development person. In 1980 he joined DIC and moved to Paris, "to help bring them into the international market." In 1982 DIC began producing for the American market.

"Were doing basically children's entertainment and family entertainment animation," Heyward explains. Animation studios in L.A. are often subject to the rise and fall of the network's six-month season, which generally results in slow periods for animation writers and artists. But that is not the case with DIC.

"We produce for foreign markets, too, and so we've been able to keep our people employed all year round. The first run syndication market has been important as well because we work for the European and Japanese markets at the same time."

### THE COMMERCIAL CHALLENGE

DIC opened its Los Angeles office in 1982 by producing 65 episodes of the first-run syndicated animated half-hour **Inspector Gadget**. Along with Filmation, DIC showed the viability and commercial success of producing directly for syndication with a 65 episode package as opposed to doing only the 13 episode groups for network animated series. **Inspector Gadget**, produced in association with LBS Communications and Field Communication, had a budget of $185,000 per half hour show. As the show's market share increased, it was decided to produce 25 additional episodes.

In its first year, DIC produced 81 half-hour programs. In its second year their output increased to 129 episodes.

"We have twenty writers working for us right now and this year we've done well over 200 half-hour episodes of our shows," Heyward states. "We have five series on the networks, two in first run syndication, three sets of specials and two animated features that we're producing—**Rainbow Brite** and **Joyce & The Wheeled Warriors**. In development we have a feature based on a major toy property which I can't discuss, plus one based on **The Littles**."

DIC was the first foreign-based studio to sell into Saturday morning television in the U.S. in the fall of 1983 with their series based on the Scholastic Books characters, **The Littles**. The series followed the success of three **Littles** specials produced by DIC for ABC.

DIC also produced thirteen episodes of **Wolf Rock TV** for ABC. This was an animated series which featured two live-action segments (one informational and one music videos) each episode. The live segments were produced by Dick Clark Productions. The series even featured an animated version of radio personality Wolfman Jack.

**Kidd Video**, airing on NBC, is a production of Saban Enterprises in association with DIC. The show combines live action with animation using contemporary music videos.

BY JAMES VAN HISE

# FRENCH MAGIC: INSIDE DIC

**With THE LITTLES and WOLFROCK TV on ABC, KIDD VIDEO on NBC and POLE POSITION and THE GETALONG GANG on CBS, DIC has made a quick and startling impact on American Saturday morning tv.**

For CBS, **Pole Position** is based on a video arcade game while **The Get Along Gang** is based on the American Greetings characters of the same name.

**Cats & Company** (starring Heathcliff) has 65 episodes going into the first-run syndication market. Heyward describes the show as being done in the style of the old Warner Brothers and Tex Avery cartoons. "The director, Bruno Bianchi, is one of our senior directors. He was a Tex Avery protege and a fan of his for years and years and that style is integrated into this series. The Tex Avery or Warner Bros. style is not expensive animation. It's a style of humor and timing more than anything else."

DIC is also bringing Hulk Hogan into the Saturday morning arena. Hogan (who was introduced to movie audiences in **Rocky II** and whose exploits have gained a lot of tv time, including on **Saturday Night Live**) scored a 61 in the TVQs (a public awareness system which most of the networks claim no longer exists). The TVQs measure the public awareness of personalities. Hogan scored the 61 in the six to twelve age group, which makes him a perfect subject for Saturday morning fare. In the same age group, the TVQs scored **The Cabbage Patch Kids** at 44, Mickey Mouse at 51, The Smurfs a 52 and The Chipmunks at 55. Bill Cosby and E.T. each scored a 60.

"We try to come up with ideas that are interesting and topical to kids, and at the same time we look for characters that are trendy. With Hulk Hogan there's an interest over a broad base of the population," Heyward explains, "so we took that character and put him into environments and stories which have nothing to do with wrestling. This is just to center on their personalities and come up with some interesting stuff for them to do." **Hulk Hogan's Rock 'N' Wrestling** is a half-hour show featuring both live action and animated segments.

## THE WORLD OF ANIMATION

While fans of the classic cartoons of Disney, Warner Bros. and others decry the current state of animation, Heyward doesn't hesitate to explain the facts of life. In the modern animation marketplace, the forces are entirely different than they were thirty and forty years ago.

"Studios don't pay to have cartoons made to run with features like they were in the old Warner Brothers days. So how are they paid for?" Heyward asks. "They're paid for by advertisers on tv, and the market those advertisers are looking to is kids.

"The networks say they're looking for original properties, but by-and-large it's lip service. They're looking for something which has pre-established marquee value, whether it be a comic book, toy, game, video game or God knows what. They prefer something that people know, have heard of. A name with some heat on it. If you come into them with a brand new property, it might be very imaginative, creative and exciting, but chances are they're not going to take it." Which explains a lot of what turns up on Saturday mornings these days.

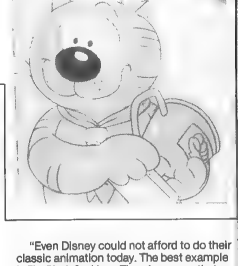
"It's always more attractive to do original properties. It's not as challenging to take somebody else's toy, but oftentimes that's where the market is. It's expensive to produce cartoons and it's very difficult to raise money for it.

"We're having some meetings right now with Ralph Bakshi and hope to do something with him. We plan to expand to theatricals and the children's area is the most natural because that's where the sponsors are. Very few animated theatricals have been financially successful, although there have been some exceptions. Generally speaking the market is going to be where the money is, which is children's advertisers—toy companies and cereal companies."

In describing the worldwide film market for animated product, Heyward states that animated theatricals do not fare much better overseas. By and large, they do no better than in the U.S.

"There is one exception, which is Disney. Disney does extremely well here with its films being rereleased, but in Europe it's ten times better. Old Disney opens every door possible but new Disney films are not doing well. The classic Disney films go on and on and make more money each time they're released in Europe." But Heyward doesn't believe that any company can afford to do the kind of animation now which Disney Studios did forty years ago.

## CATS & CO. stars Heathcliff in a syndicated series



"Even Disney could not afford to do their classic animation today. The best example is **The Black Cauldron**. There's no way that film will make back its investment, ever."

In describing DIC Enterprises for modern theatrical features, Heyward states, "We'd like to do some adult themed animation with Bakshi, something which has a big musical base to it. I can't be any more specific than that at the moment."

Like most studios producing for tv, whether they be DIC and Filmation in Los Angeles, or Nelvana in Canada, the animation is largely done overseas by a Japanese animation house.

"We do all of the pre-production and post-production in L.A.—all of the development work on the show, writing the scripts, storyboards, model sheets, voice recordings, timing and character sheets. We send out the preproduction work to Japan and it comes back as a rough cut. Then we do the sound effects, dialogue, editing, video work and all of the music." With a staff of 300 employees, DIC Enterprises definitely has a lot to do despite the bulk of the animation being done overseas.

## EXPANDED HORIZONS

Various specials are now in production. Three of these are based on the United Media comic strip "Robotman" and two on the Hallmark character Rainbow Brite.

There is also an animated feature based on Rainbow Brite for theatrical release by Warner Brothers in November. Production has already begun on a theatrical version of **Joyce & The Wheeled Warriors** and on **Littles**

Counter-clockwise from left, Kidd Video, Rainbow Brite and Hulk Hogan's Rock 'n' Wrestling.

**Statue of Liberty** (a sequel to **Here Come the Littles**) being distributed by Atlantic Releasing.

But DIC is not limiting itself just to animation. Just as it has included live action in some of its Saturday morning shows, so it is expanding into this creative arena with full length theatricals. One will feature Hulk Hogan, Andre the Giant and other of their wrestling pals. And they also have plans for a live action television series.

DIC is developing a possible late-night series to star Elvira (Cassandra Peterson), host of tv's **Movie Macabre** as well as two live-action series for Global tv of Canada.

The company also has its own merchandising division. In the case of **Inspector Gadget**, a property which DIC owns, there are more than a hundred licensed products including toys, videocassettes and even children's clothing.

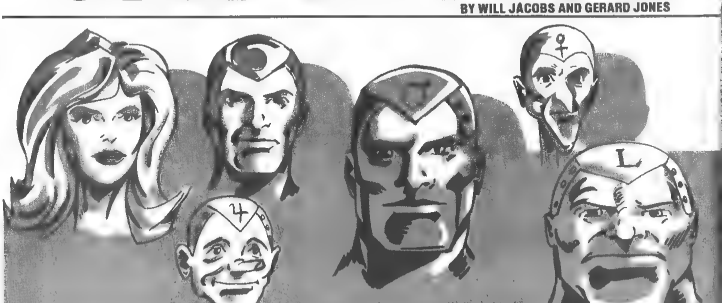
Since DIC's parent company is located in France while the production facility for the films is in the U.S. with principal animation done in Japan, the firm strives to make the most of its worldwide talent. Thus the overseas animation is not just done for sound economic reasons, but because the talent there can bring a different look to the material under the time restrictions that they labor.

Says Heyward, "In the United States, animation quality was very good in the old days of theatrical-quality cartoons, but you don't find that any more on Saturday morning. The shows today are timed by the pound; they're virtually weighed. The problem is that when you're producing for a Saturday morning deadline, you have to turn in a high volume of work in a very short time.

"We try to get a lot of things from the Orient that aren't available here, like high-quality special effects and very sophisticated camera work. Their direction is very imaginative and the camera is moving all the time. But we've gotten away from doing the animation itself in the Orient because it's not acceptable in the states—traditional Japanese animation has big eyes, thin lips and tall foreheads. So we set up our own team and equipment there—it's not a subcontract operation—and take the best of what's available and give it an American style of animation." CF

# SILVER AGE

BY WILL JACOBS AND GERARD JONES



With the **Metal Men** DC proved itself ready, at last, to create some innovative heroes of its own. Yet Robert Kanigher would produce no more of those heroes; nor would Schwartz or Weisinger, whose comics had attained such a steady level of success that no experimentation seemed called for. Rather, the new characters would emerge from the stable that had suffered worst over the preceeding few years, where innovation was most welcome to revitalize its slumpng products.

The team-system that had been producing the comics of Jack Schiff's stable since the 1940s came to an end in the early 1960s. "On a small scale, the cooperative aspect was good in many ways," Schiff remembers, "but on the large scale that emerged, it became unwieldy." He wanted to return to overseeing a few titles from start to completion of each issue, including plotting the stories himself. Thus, by 1963, Schiff had turned **Challengers of the Unknown**, **My Greatest Adventure**, **Tomahawk** and **House of Secrets** over to Art Director Murray Boltinoff (although the last title was shortly returned to Schiff), and **Aquaman**, **Blackhawk** and **Rip Hunter** over to former story-editor George Kashdan, thereby leaving himself with a manageable load of five comics. 1964 saw a more drastic redistribution of assignments: The three titles featuring Batman were not selling as well as the front office thought they should, and so they were shifted to Schwartz and Weisinger, editors who had recently had more luck with superheroes. Weisinger took **World's Finest**, fittting it into his Superman mythos; Schwartz assumed control of **Batman** and **Detective**, causing him to give his science fiction titles, **Mystery in Space** and **Strange Adventures**, to Schiff. (Schiff's involvement with the Caped Crusader would continue, however, in assisting the makers of the **Batman** tv show In 1966). This left Schiff with a group of comics devoted entirely, and appropriately, to science fiction and supernatural adventure. It was then that his own style reasserted itself. In his non-series stories, the humanization trend that Marvel had sparked enabled him to shift away from monsters and fantastic happenings, back to characterization. Many were moral tales of the sort Lee and Ditko also specialized in, in which the protagonist is a scientist, criminal or plutocrat possessed by greed or fear, whose own weaknesses destroy him as he grabs for control of time, space or the forces of other worlds. Others, such as "Missing: One Alien," featuring the monstrous but comical buddies L'on and Vaar, were lighthearted romps in which the bizarre aliens became appealing, distinctive characters (**TU** 84, Sept. 1964). Such supernatural hero-series as Mark Merlin and the Enchantress meanwhile returned to the prominence denied them by the monster craze. Although a far cry from the beautiful work of the Schwartz stable, Schiff's science fiction and supernatural comics nonetheless showed the stirrings of revitalization.

### OTHER EDITOR'S LEFTOVERS

Adam Strange changed radically in the move from Schwartz to Schiff, with Lee Elias replacing Carmine Infantino and the plots departing from their ingenious scientific bent, but his adventures continued to be fairly sprightly and entertaining until his cancellation in **Mystery in Space** 102 (Sept. 1965). He was backed up in that title by Space Ranger, now drawn in a fanciful small-figured style, reminiscent of Dick Sprang in its detail and charm, by Golden Age veteran Howard Purcell. The Martian Manhunter, meanwhile, continue unperturbed in **House of Mystery** until 159 (June 1966), when he abruptly discarded his pet Zook and his fantastical nature to become a tone secret agent in an unending battle with the faceless leader of a criminal conspiracy. The stories were refreshing at first, but soon suffered from repetition. The only other old series to continue under Schiff was Star Hawkins, which ran intermittently in **Strange Adventure**. Its stories were not much more inspired than they had been under Schwartz, but now the art included some of Gil Kane's finest work. Overall, these four survivors ran largely on momentum. The great strength of the Schiff, Kashdan and Boltinoff stables would be

# THE WORLD'S STRANGEST HEROES

CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN
"PRISONERS of ROBOT PLANET!"
ACE IS BEING SHOT OFF INTO OUTER SPACE AND IT'S OUR TURN NEXT!
SEA DEVILS
SEA DEVILS
OCTOPUS MAN!

© 1985 DC Comics

the panoply of new heroes waiting just around the corner.

Kashdan was less successful than Schiff at keeping his comics entertaining and attractive. For one thing, he seemed unable to shake off the effects of the monster craze that had held sway in the first years of the decade. **Blackhawk** continued its decline while Rip Hunter's adventures were more and more dominated by weird creatures. It became Kashdan's lot to pick up ailing, minor series from other editors, with Kanigher's **Sea Devils** in 1964 and Schwartz's **Hawkman** in 1967. Both were damaged in transit. The first lost the technical accuracy with which Kanigher had imbued it and devolved to undersea monster hunts. In the second, a tired Chuck Cuidera replaced Murphy Anderson and, in most issues, battles with aliens and strange creatures replaced interesting Earthbound mysteries. Kashdan also received **The Brave and the Bold** from Kanigher and Schwartz, which he transformed into a showcase for regular superhero team-ups (BB 50, Nov. 1963). The stories brought together such unlikely pairings as Green Arrow and the Martain Manhunter, the Metal Men and the Atom and Batman and Aquaman. The quality was rarely high, but the idea was fun for kids and the tales were entertainingly written by Bob Haney. And one of the team-ups was to result in a popular new superhero group.

Kashdan's greatest success with a series he inherited came with **Aquaman**. With the colorful and naturalistic art of Nick Cardy gracefully illustrating the brisk, light scripts, the series was granted a lively, if simple, charm. Aquaman's Atlantis grew during Kashdan's years, beginning with the introduction of Mera, the Sea King's other-dimensional love. Their marriage in 18 (Oct. 1964) was the first prominent one in the realm of superheros. Soon came their son, Aquababy, Aqualad's girlfriend Tula (more often "Aquagirl") and many scientists, leaders and citizens of Atlantis. The hero's menaces were varied, his adventures usually set in the colorful underwater world but occasionally reaching to the surface. Continuity was greater than most in that extended editorial stable.

Meanwhile, Murray Boltinoff continued his own inherited series, **Challengers**, at a fairly static level. But it was from his desk that the first of the new breed of heroes came.

## THE WORLD'S STRANGEST HEROES

They were called "The World's Strangest Heroes" on the cover, and they did their best to live up to the claim. Movie star Rita Farr, test-pilot Larry Trainor and adventurer Cliff Steele were all survivors of horrible accidents. In surviving, each of them had been weirdly transformed, turned into freaks in the eyes of men. Rita, lost in an African jungle, inhaled vapors that caused her to grow uncontrollably to monsterous size. Unknown waves high in the atmosphere created a "strange duplicate," a being of negative energy inside Larry Trainor. When "Negative Man" emerges from its host body, Larry falls to the edge of unconsciousness, and if it does not return in sixty seconds, Larry will die. When Cliff was mangled in a high-speed auto crash, the only way to keep his brain alive was to

# SILVER AGE

10¢
DR. STRANGE
ADAM STRANGE
MARVEL 25 MILLION MILES TO MARS...
"THE MECHANICAL MASTERS OF MARS!"
UNEXPECTED
THE CREATURE IN THE GLASS BALL
A TIME MASTER
YEOW!
LOOK WHAT THEY'RE DUMPING INTO THE WATER WITH US!
QUADRO, THE FOUR-FINNED DEMON OF THE DEEP!

# Monsters and alien menaces increasingly dominated the DC Comics of the late Fifties and early Sixties.

install it in an experimental metal body, turning him into an expressionless, mechanical "Robot Man."

Outcasts from mankind, embittered by their fates, these three draw deep into self-exile until gathered together by a mysterious genius in a wheelchair whom they call the Chief. He trains them to use their freakish natures for the good of mankind, teaching Rita to grow and shrink at will as Elasti-Girl, Larry to make Negative Man a super-powered servant and Robot Man to turn his own body into a powerful, durable weapon. When a mysterious deathless oligarch of crime named General Immortus plots to steal atomic fuel for his own evil aims, the fledgling heroes turn the tables on him through teamwork and self-sacrifice. The press plays up their feat, writing "Three exiles from the human race battled to save a world that had rejected them," and christening them "The Doom Patrol." "Life isn't over for us," Rita decides. "It's just beginning!" (**My Greatest Adventure** 80, June 1963).

**The Doom Patrol**, with its heroes cut off from society and doubting the worth of their own powers, was the first DC comic to incorporate some of the ideas being pioneered by Marvel. It also brought an air of darkness and mystery into the usually-sunny world of DC heroes, and continued the swing towards bizarre characters begun by the Metal Men. Boltinoff, displaying an eye for unusual art, assigned Bruno Premiani, an Italian newspaper cartoonist who taught at Argentina's National School of Fine Arts, to draw the strip. Using a careful, almost classical approach, Premiani prevented the DP's oddity from turning comicality of the Metal Men sort. His use of deep shadow and expressive faces accented the mystery and dramatic power of the idea. Writer Arnold Drake kept the torments of his characters always in mind. "When they write about our 'daring exploits,'" says Larry Trainor about the press, "what do they call us?... [They] never use our human names! We're still just **freaks** to them!" To which Cliff replies, "That's all we'll ever be—misfits—so get used to it!" (MGA 81, Aug. 1963).

The early adventures of the Doom Patrol were among DC's most intriguing creations. The first few stories involved induced hallucinations, the mystery of the Chief's past and a berserk Negative Man. Robot Man was graphically melted and smashed. In one story he even tore himself apart in order to use his own arms and legs as weapons. (DP 87, May 1964). Apart from General Immortus, their principal villains were the Brotherhood of Evil, a freakish bunch consisting of a disembodied brain, an intelligent murderous gorilla and a woman with putty-flesh who could mold her face into any visage (DP 86, March 1964).

At last the bizarre and outlandish elements that had run through the comics of Schiff and his associates could be put to good effect. Where in the past they had only served as hokey menaces for mundane heroes, they now served as the focal point in the creation of the heroes themselves. The new heroes, in fact, were so very outlandish that the nature of their powers required a whole new bent to superhero adventures.

### HERO & VILLAIN

Combining this new bizarre hero-style with the Marvel approach to ambivalent characterization, the stable quickly produced its second successful innovation with Eclipso, "Hero and Villain in One Man." Although created by writer Haney and editor Boltinoff, with the vigorous art of Lee Elias (**House of Secrets 61**, Aug. 1963), **Eclipso** reached its peak when Schiff himself took over soon after, bringing artist Jack Sparling with him.

Eclipso was like a Mr. Hyde to scientist Bruce Gordon's Dr. Jekyll. When Gordon goes to a primitive island to photograph a solar eclipse, a witch-doctor stashes him with a mysterious black diamond. Some time later, back in civilization, when the sun is again eclipsed, Gordon is suddenly transformed into a diabolical, half-blue villain. Gradually, as the series unfolds, it emerges that with every eclipse this creature, calling itself Eclipso, will either continue to take over Gordon's body or split from him as a separate evil entity (HS 63, Dec. 1963). After many experiments, Gordon discovers that only intense light can banish his evil side.

Eclipso soon learns that Gordon will probably be able to keep defeating him, but also knows that future eclipses will free him again. He takes to stealing and hiding weapons that he can use in future incarnations to defeat his alter ego and continue his criminal rampages. His greatest weapon is the black diamond itself, which possesses amazing abilities of transmutation. Once he goes so far as to use the diamond to create a couple of synthetic, loyal "Moon Creatures" who engineer an artifical eclipse to set their master free of Gordon's virtuous form (HS 77, Apr. 1966).

In keeping with the new breed of Schiff hero, Eclipso's peculiar nature made his adventures different from any others in comics. This was a series in which the only super-powered character was a villain and in which the hero rather than fighting some new menace every issue, was concerned only with his own alter ego.

The stories were made strong by a mysterious flavor of intrigue and espionage as Gordon and Eclipso matched wits. Eclipso's schemes were often on a vast scale, bringing government forces and secret service men into play. They were not confined to one area, causing the stories to move from one exotic locale to another. Aided in his battle with Eclipso by a fellow scientist and his daughter (who was also Gordon's fiancee), Gordon formed the center of a strong and likable cast of characters.

Rendering the stories was Jack Sparling the best regular artist in Schiff's stable. Sparling's art was very scratchy and hasty looking, but imbued with a dynamism and an emotional current that electrified the pages. Sparling's figures, as well as his layouts in general, were constructed on a rounded line—fleshy, full-bodied people; lush, sloping backgrounds—along which the action rolled at breakneck speed. NEXT ISSUE: We'll look at still more of the innovations that emerged from the Schiff stable at DC. CF

# STRIP SEARCH

## RON GOULART

One of America's best-known undercover men had his fiftieth anniversary last year and the event went virtually unnoticed and uncelebrated. No publicity, no parades, not even a gold watch for a half century of dedicated crookcatching and spysmashing. Quite a contrast to the optimistic days of January, 1934, when William Randolph Hearst's King Features Syndicate launched *Secret Agent X-9* with much fanfare and the simple statement that it was "the greatest detective strip ever produced." Although the strip never lived up to that claim, under its original title or the more recent one of *Secret Agent Corrigan*, it did employ several notable artists as well as two of the most successful mystery writers of the century.

In 1931 Al Capone was tried for income tax evasion, Hollywood released *Little Caesar, Public Enemy, The Maltese Falcon*—the Ricardo Cortez version—and over fifty other gangster and detective movies, and Chester Gould, formerly of Pawnee, Oklahoma, sold a new comic strip to the Chicago Tribune syndicate. *Dick Tracy* was a hardboiled opus, full of gangsters, tough cops, tommy guns and fast cars, noise and violence—the same ingredients the movie studios, especially Warner Brothers, had been successfully peddling since the new decade of the Thirties began. Gould's strip was a rapid and impressive success, a fact that didn't go unheeded at the other syndicates.

King Features, being King Features, decided to try not one detective strip but a flock of them. "I thought Brandon Walsh was off his rocker," cartoonist Will Gould once recalled. "The syndicate wouldn't hold still for *two* detective strips! But Walsh convinced me that detective stuff was the hottest around." This was late in 1933, detectives and tough guys continued to flourish in the media and in real life. Hearst's syndicate, anxious to cash in on the trend, was willing to hold still for any number of tough detective and cop strips. The two Will Gould is talking about were *X-9* and *Red Barry*. Through Walsh, who was scripting *Little Annie Rooney* for King, Gould learned that "Joe Connolly was looking for someone to draw a detective strip that was being written by Dashiell Hammett." Gould, an admirer of Hammett's novels and the films being made from them, thought a strip by Hammet was a great idea. "Well, I dunno," he quoted Walsh as saying. "'Joe Connolly's going crazy trying to get an artist to do it. They've

# SECRET AGENT—PART I

GET MOVING, YOU MUGS AND DON'T FORGET THE BOMBS!
MAKING FAST TO THE PYTHIA, THE THUGS UNDER DEACON'S SURE PYSON, SWARM UP HER SIDE CARRYING MACHINE-GUNS, REVOLVERS AND BOMBS
OK, SON, LEAD ME TO THAT STRONG BOX!!
CAN'T FIND NO KEY, DEACON
ALL RIGHT, BURN IT OPEN, MACK!
I'LL GO THRU IT LIKE WATER THRU A SIEVE!
WHILE THE DISABLED LINER PYTHIA'S CARGO OF BULLION IS BEING REMOVED BY THE TOPS MEN...
PYTHIA
BOMBS ARE BEING PLACED IN HER HOLD TO SINK HER AS SOON AS THE PIRATES ARE THROUGH...
AND HER LIFE BOATS ARE DESTROYED SO NOBODY ABOARD HER WILL LIVE TO TELL WHAT HAPPENED!
MEANWHILE X-9 IS LOST IN A FOG OVER THE ATLANTIC
THEY OUGHT TO BE AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE. CAN YOU SEE ANYTHING?
NOT IN THIS FOG!

tried everybody, cartoonists and illustrators alike, including Russell Patterson and Jefferson Machamer. But Hearst won't buy." It was Hearst himself who had instructed Connolly to get Hammett to write something that could compete with *Dick Tracy*. King Features had already serialized some of Hammett's hardboiled fiction and that had helped build circulations. Hammett, who was devoting a good part of his time to drinking in this period wasn't enthusiastic about doing a comic strip—when asked by an interviewer at this time what his hobby was, Hammett had answered, "I drink a lot." When the Hearst organization offered him a salary of $500 a week and a free creative hand, Hammett agreed. Though he lived for nearly another thirty years, the continuity for the X-9 strip would be the last printed detective material he'd ever write.

## ENTER ALEX RAYMOND

Urged by his friend Walsh, Will Gould decided to try out for the X-9 job and drew up a sample to show Connoly. "Connolly liked it," according to Gould. I was given three weeks of continuity and told to go ahead . . . after first being warned that Hearst had the last word. I was paid for three weeks that were then hurried off to San Simeon." Gould was aware that several others were turning in X-9 samples. Among them was Alex Raymond, then in his early twenties and pulling down $20 a week in the King bullpen. While Gould was awaiting the word from San Simeon, Walsh convinced him that King was willing to buy more than one detective strip and suggested he get busy on some new samples.

Walsh dragged him home, gave him several sheets of bristol board and told him to come up with something to show Connolly the next day. Knowing he had a reputation for being a procrastinator and a misser of deadlines, Gould sat down at his drawing board when Walsh left and vowed to work all night. "But some pals showed

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42

## In The Marvel Universe They Are—

# EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES

**Thor, The Hulk, Iron Man, Ant Man, The Wasp, Captain America, Giant Man, Hawkeye, The Scarlet Witch, Quicksilver, Hercules, The Black Panther, Goliath, The Vision, The Swordsman, Mantis, Wonder Man, Starfox, Captain Marvel, The Black Knight, Mockingbird, Tigra, The Sub-Mariner. . . are among the illustrious heroes who have answered the roll call of Earth's Mightiest Heroes. Gathered together to combat those forces no individual hero can cope with, these are truly the best the Marvel Universe has to offer. One of Marvel's earliest titles—their first real team book—the grand tradition continues to this day as James Van Hise, a contributing editor of COMICS FEATURE, spoke with the editor and writers responsible for The Avengers and The West Coast Avengers to learn both what lies ahead and how they view each member of the team.**

'The X-Men fight the good fight unseen, at the fringes of society. But the Avengers are our spearhead against adversity, a collective of powers gathered to accomplish the greatest good. These are Earth's mightiest heroes, forming the front line against alien invasions, criminal masterminds, evil secret organizations . . .

In the beginning, **The Avengers** of 1963 provided a meeting place for fans of Thor, Ant-Man, The Hulk and Iron Man. There fans of one hero could become readers of another. All of the heroes appearing in **The Avengers** premiere had their own series with the exception of The Hulk, who was temporarily out of work. Over the years the team has gone through such a turnover that rather than being a shill for series characters, it has often become a safe harbor for heroes who lack a series of their own. Prince Namor, the Sub-Mariner lost his book some time ago and Hercules has never had more than a miniseries. Both are regular teammates in the current Avengers.

Today's Avengers has branched out into two groups, the traditional New York team based at Avengers Mansion and the new West Coast Avengers. Coordinated under editor Mark Gruenwald, **The Avengers** is written by Roger Stern (and drawn by the popular team of John Buscema and Tom Palmer) while the recently instituted **West Coast Avengers** is written by Steve Englehart who was a primary writer on the original title a decade ago.

### THE EAST COAST AVENGERS

Stern views **The Avengers** as unique. With many group books around, the difference he sees is that the Avengers are truly an organization.

"It's a group of incredibly powerful people who have gotten together to handle threats that are beyond the scope of individual characters or normal peacekeeping forces," Stern explains. "I think that organization is really the key word because they've got a charter, by-laws, regular meetings, a place to meet—the works! The Fantastic Four is more informal. They have a corporation these days, but they're really a small family. The old X-Men and X-Factor now have the whole concept of a school set up to teach mutant outcasts how to get along in society.

"The Avengers is an organization made up of individuals—pretty strong-willed individuals who don't always agree on the best course of action, but they get together and interact for the common good. When they interact they take on some of the aspects of an extended family. You get arguments, hassles and friendships between some of them; between others there are animosities and romances. There is even a little bit of the schooling angle because they have training facilities. Captain America is there—the greatest trainer you could ever want. It's really a bunch of individual heroes coming together and making a whole that's greater than the sum of its parts."

Before Stern took over chronicling the exploits of one of Marvel's oldest superteams **The Avengers** was written by Jim Shooter. Increasing demands on the company's editor-in-chief's time (no doubt brought on by the creation of the two **Secret Wars** super-series) forced him to relinquish the reins of the book.

"Mark Gruenwald had become editor of **The Avengers** and I heard from him that they were going to be needing a new writer. I called Jim Shooter to tell him that I was interested. Shooter said, 'Whatever you do, don't kill Hank Pym—he's been through too much already!' He told me what he'd had in mind for the series and I incorporated a bit of that and took off from there. Things have sort of grown since."

The myriad dynamic characters often dictate the directions that stories will take, according to Stern.

"It's a cliche that books write themselves. Everyone's heard that and they go, 'That's baloney.' While it is an oversimplification, things happen in **The Avengers** that I never would have foreseen when I first started on the series.

"For example," Stern continues, "when I started the Old Guard had returned. Captain America, Iron Man, Thor, the Wasp . . . and of course She-Hulk and Hawkeye had joined. Then things started happening. For one thing, three of the characters had their own books and events in **Iron Man** and **Thor** necessitated them leaving **The Avengers**, at least for a time. I needed someone else to come in. Mark Gruenwald suggested Eros and Starfox. In the crossover that I did with John Byrne, we brought in the Vision and the Scarlet Witch. That was originally thought of as being a guest appearance. It grew into an entire storyline. As I was developing it, more and more things started coming together. It's something that can only happen when you have a congregation of very individual and distinct characters. The way they play off of each other will often send stories in directions that I hadn't anticipated."

### DYNAMIC PERSONALITIES

The current lineup, which Stern hopes will remain stable for awhile, consists of Captain America, the Wasp, Captain Marvel, Hercules, the Black Knight and, perhaps most surprisingly, the Sub-Mariner.

"Namor will be staying in the group for a time at least. There will be a crossover coming up with Alpha Flight in the spring of '86. Bill Mantlo wants to do something involving Marina and the whole Atlantis situation. Even after that I hope to keep the Sub-Mariner in the Avengers. He's sort of the wild card in the group. Because he's someone with serious attitude problems, he doesn't get along with anyone really well. He can even rub Captain America, who is like an old war buddy of his, the wrong way. And Cap was instrumental in getting him into the Avengers!"

# THE AVENGERS

EARTH'S MIGHTIEST SUPER HEROES CANNOT SAVE THE EARTH..

...THIS LITTLE MAN CAN. BUT TO DO IT WILL **DESTROY** HIM!

THE PEOPLE! THEY ARE BOWING TO A PETRIFIED FIGURE, FROZEN WITHIN A CAKE OF ICE!
HEAR ME, HUMANS! THIS IS NO HELPLESS IMAGE YOU SEE BEFORE YOU! THIS IS THE SUB-MARINER WHO HAS SWORN VENGEANCE UPON THE ENTIRE HUMAN RACE!
ET IS THE DREADED NAMOR— THE LEGENDARY SUB!
RUN, YOU WEAK, HELPLESS MORTALS! FLEE IN TERROR BEFORE THE RIGHTFUL WRATH OF NAMOR! THUS SHALL ALL OF MANKIND ONE DAY SHRIEK IN PANIC AT THE COMING OF THE SUB-MARINER!
AND TAKE YOUR ACCURSED IDOL WITH YOU! GO— SPREAD THE WORD!— LET THE WORLD KNOW THAT NAMOR IS STILL A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH!
BAH! I AM KILLED WITH SHAME! I AM DISGRACED!
HAS THE MIGHTY NAMOR BEEN REDUCED TO FIGHTING HELPLESS, FEARFUL MANTWISH?
HIS VERY SOUL IN A TURMOIL, THE FRUSTRATED NAMOR FLIES MARINER LAUNCH, THOUGHTLESSLY MEER-ESLY, CAUSING AN AVALANCHE OF ICE IN HIS THUNDEROUS RAGE!
IS THIS ALL MY STRENGTH IS GOOD FOR? TO LASH OUT AT UNCOMPREHENDING ESKIMOS??
RUN! FLEE THE ICE FLOE! HE MUST REACH THE TRADING POST!
THE WORLD MUST BE WARNED OF NAMOR'S RAMPAGE! THE SEA PRINCE HAS GONE MAD!
AND WHAT OF THE MYSTERIOUS FIGURE IMPRISONED WITHIN THE BLOCK OF ICE? SILENTLY IT FLOATS AWAY, UNSEEN, UNHEARD...
UNTIL IT HITS THE WARM WATERS OF THE GULF STREAM, WHERE THE ROCK-HARD OUTER ICE SHEATH BEGINS TO SLOWLY MELT...

**Prince Namor is the newest and perhaps most surprising Avenger.**

What makes Namor unique is that for many years he was Marvel's favorite hero-villain.

"There are a lot of things that the Sub-Mariner used to do that he has come to terms with," Stern explains. "This is a guy who's led guerrilla raids on New York at least two or three times. He's exotic, not really like anyone who's ever been in the Avengers before. That makes him the spark for all the other characters to play off.

"In the third issue of **The Avengers**, he and the Hulk were doing their best to annihilate them! Now it's 'Geeze, this guy's an Avenger—how did that happen?' "

Stern views Namor as a character who has experienced wrenching changes throughout his life.

"He grew up in Atlantis, where he was stronger than anybody else. Undoubtedly, since he was royalty, some of the family there led him to believe that he was better than everybody else while he was growing up. I'm certain there must have been some Atlantean prejudice in there because he was a half-breed. He has a long history of thinking himself superior to other people; not getting along despite the fact that down deep he's a good guy. He's suffered from bad press, at least half of which he's brought on himself. Namor has got to start

UNTIL FINALLY, THE LIGHT REVEALS BUT A FROZEN, PETRIFIED FIGURE! THEN . . . A FIGURE, WHICH, WHEN IT'S PAST THE DIVERSE SEA, CRIES . . . "I AM THE AVENGERS!"
CAUTIOUSLY OPENING THE AIR-TIGHT ESCAPE HATCH, THE HUGE KIND OF GIANT-MAN BELIEVES THE RIGHT FIGURE SAID . . .
WHO CAN HE BE? WHY IS HE FROZEN SO, SO?
LOOK! BENEATH HIS TATTERED CLOTHES SOMETHING GLEAMS . . . COLORFUL CYLINDERS!
STOP THE ENGINES . . . HEY, WAIT! THERE IS SOMETHING OUT THERE!
I DON'T . . . IT'S A HUMAN! THIS MAN IS ALIVE!
WHAT I DON'T KNOW, I RECOGNIZE . . . THE SHIELD . . . THE COLORS . . . YES, HE'S A CAPTAIN AMERICA!
THE MAGIC MIGHT!
AND . . . AND THE MAGIC WITH THE ENDS . . . I BELIEVE IT MIGHT BE . . .
ALL . . . ESTROYED . . . BREAK . . . TEAM . . .

**The Golden Age Captain America, revived in AVENGERS 4, personifies the team.**

© 1980 Marvel Comics Group

to grow up a bit. He's been around a long time and he's never really acted all that responsibly. Now he's going to have some responsibility drummed into him.'

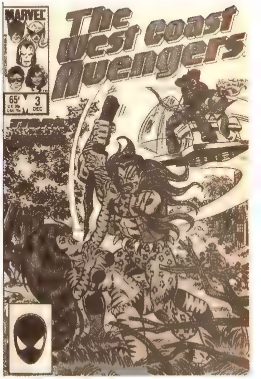
Since Namor is not appearing in an individual series of his own, Stern is the principal writer of the character. He controls the Sub-Mariner's destiny. "Gee, that sounds important," Stern laughs. "Most of the time I try to keep him out of fights with Hercules!"

**SUPER TEAMWORK**

In the past, leadership of the Avengers has fallen to Iron Man and Captain America

MARVEL
ANNIVERSARY
1982 MARVEL COMICS GROUP
75¢
APR
02100
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
The West Coast Avengers
HENRY PYM--
TORN BETWEEN
TWO ULTRONS!
CAN EVEN WONDER MAN SAVE HIM?
30 COMICS FEATURE

© 1985 Marvel Comics Group



Things have changed. The choice of the present leader is especially surprising in light of such powerhouse members as Hercules and Namor.

"The Wasp is the leader," states Stern, "and that has put her though a lot of changes because she used to be the coquette of the super-hero world. She was the youngest, and probably one of those people whom no one took seriously when she was a girl. She played to that. She got her little flirt act down solid as sort of her little joke on the world because down deep she's pretty tough when the chips are down. In the very first story with the Wasp, her father had been killed. Henry Pym (then the Ant Man) was very impressed because she picked herself up and said, 'I don't know what it takes, but I'll find some way to avenge him.'" What better person to lead The Avengers?

"Since she's the leader of the group, she's had to move away from the flirt act and lay down the law and make it stick to this motley crew of heroes. There was also the divorce she had to go through and a lot of sticky circumstances. These characters are going through a maturation process just from the circumstances they're involved with."

Avengers headquarters serves as the residence for some members and a stopping off place for others. "Right now, only the Black Knight, Hercules and the Sub-Mariner reside at the mansion," Stern reveals. "Captain America is giving up his apartment in Brooklyn Heights. He'll have a room in the Avengers Mansion and be gone on the road a lot due to circumstances in his own book. He'll be sleeping over at the mansion from time to time but not actually residing there.

"The Wasp has her own property in New Jersey and probably a penthouse someplace in Manhattan as well. Captain Marvel lives in New Orleans. That's the great thing about being able to travel at the speed of light—you can live anywhere. It's a fast commute."

Some of the Avengers have always been a lot more super than others. In some cases, it has made the others seem as though they were just window dressing, with the burden carried by the more powerful members. But that's not the way that writer Stern views his characters.

"At times it would seem that way but it's not always the case. In issue 266, which is an epilogue to the whole **Secret Wars II** series, it has the Avengers, the Fantastic Four and the Silver Surfer trying to fix a giant portion of the Rockies which has been obliterated by something that The Beyonder did before he left. There's a big hole—we're talking something that makes the Grand Canyon look like a chuckhole—and Hercules figures to just pick up big rocks and fill the hole in. Sub-Mariner gives Hercules a hard time, saying that there's a lot of strong guys here, but

STAN LEE PRESENTS: EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES!
THE AVENGERS
"...AND THE WAR'S DESOLATION!"
GUEST-STARRING THE FABULOUS FANTASTIC FOUR
BEHOLD THE SILVER SURFER! FOR UNTOLD AGES, HE SOARED AMONGST THE STARS, SEEKING OUT PLANETS TO SUSTAIN THE WORLD-DEVOURING GALACTUS - BUT THE DAY CAME WHEN HE DEFIED THE MASTER...
--AND ROSE UP IN DEFENSE OF OUR LITTLE WORLD AS PUNISHMENT... TO LIVE UPON THIS EARTH IN ETERNAL EXILE!
WHAT MADNESS IS THIS?!? WHEN I CROSSED THIS LAND HERE WEEKS AGO - ALL WAS WELL - BUT NOW...
ROGER STERN - WRITER
JOHN BUSCEMA - BREAKDOWNS
TOM PALMER - FINISHED ART
JIM NOVAK - LETTERER
CHRISTIE SCHEELE - COLORIST
MARK GRUENWALD - EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER - EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
I FIND A PLANET ENTERING THE EARLY STAGES OF ITS DEATH THROES!!
© 1986 Marvel Comics Group

"SO..."
I HAVE HIM, NAMOR! NOW, GET OUT OF THERE, 'FORE THE FIRES CLAIM YOU!
DON'T WORRY, HERCULES -- I'LL GET HIM!
NAMOR?
NAMOR!
HERCULES! CATCH!!

**Prince Namor proves his value to his teammates.**

© 1985 Marvel Comics Group

strength isn't going to do any good in a situation like this. That's an example. There are situations where overall strength just won't do. Plus you have the fact that Hercules is one of the great direct thinkers of our time, or non-thinkers, as the case may be.

"Sub-Mariner has a different kind of ego, but it's just as strong. There are times when just going in and punching something out isn't going to be the solution. You've got to have a plan; you've got to work together as a team and take advantage of all the powers and abilities. It's like that old thing where if you've got Thor in the group, why do you need everybody else? While that's true in certain cases," Stern admits, "in other situations it may not be an advantage to have Thor. I recall an early issue where having Thor around was a definite minus. The Enchantress had made Thor think that the other Avengers had turned bad, so they spent most of the issue trying to stay alive!"

### THE GENESIS OF THE X-FACTOR!

While it may seem that **The Avengers** tie-in with the **X-Factor** was just used for convenience, it's something quite the contrary. Rather it's because Roger Stern helped conceive the idea which would later widen Bob Layton's concept of the new series.

"It's a long, involved story," Stern begins. "It starts a couple of years ago when I was having a discussion with Kurt Busiek, an assistant editor at Marvel. We were playing the old game of what you'd do if you wrote this or that title. He said, 'If I were doing the **X-Men**, I'd bring back Jean Grey.' I said, 'Oh no, not the Phoenix again'. I'd had it up to here with the Phoenix. But he said, 'No, not the Phoenix. Jean Grey. Jean Grey never was the Phoenix. She's still down at the bottom of the river there someplace.' We talked about it, had a good chuckle and knew that we'd probably never write the **X-Men**. But it was fun to speculate on! One time I mentioned all this in passing to John Byrne and he thought it was a great idea. He mentioned the idea to Chris Claremont one time but Chris wasn't interested in bringing back Jean Grey—just Phoenix."

Time passes. Shot of leaves blowing past, snow falling, pages flying off the calendar. Then we're there.

"Then Bob Layton came up with the idea for X-Factor," Stern continues. "I was sitting around talking to Bob and told him that I had a story idea that he might want to use somewhere down the line, but I didn't want to tell him what it was just yet. About a week later he was having lunch with John Byrne and Bob told him that I had an idea for X-Factor that I wouldn't tell him. John said, 'Well I'll tell you what it is!' The next thing I knew I got three phone calls in a row from Bob saying that it was a great idea. I explained that it wasn't all my idea, but he said, 'I don't care! It's still a great idea! I'm throwing out the opening story I had for X-Factor and we'll incorporate this into it!' So Bob called together a big meeting. I flew into the city and Bob was there with John Byrne in Jim Shooter's office. We spent hours formulating all the possibilities. Out of that grew the crossovers into the **Avengers**/**The Fantastic Four** and the first issue of **X-Factor**."

### ON THE DRAWING BOARD

A lot more lies ahead for the Avengers which has nothing to do with the X-Factor.

"There's a cameo appearance by some of the original Avengers, and I mean *original*," Stern stresses. "Avengers like the Hulk, Giant-Man and Iron Man in his old, golden armor in issue 267. It's part of a three-part storyline involving Kang the Conqueror. I'm shamelessly using some bad puns and plays on words in the titles. The first one is 'Time and Time Again,' the second 'The Kang Dynasty' and the third one is going to be called 'The Once and Future Kang.' I can hear people groaning out there already. It's going to pull together a lot of things from Kang's previous appearances and set down his rather convoluted history in one hopefully coherent package. We'll be able to understand who Kang is from now on.

MILES TO THE NORTHWEST, A SQUAD OF ARMY ENGINEERS STANDS BY, AWED BY THE SPECTACLE BEFORE THEM.
NOR ARE THEY THE ONLY ONES...
WATER
ARMY ORDNANCE GOT ME THE COMPONENTS I NEEDED TO ASSEMBLE THIS GEO-STRESS ANALYZER IN RECORD TIME—BUT IF MY PRELIMINARY FINDINGS ARE CORRECT, ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD WOULDN'T BE ENOUGH
ZOUNDS! HOW DEEP IS THIS CHASM?

© 1985 Marvel Comics Group

"After that will be the crossover with Alpha Flight."

Also in the near future is the return of a team of villains who made their grand entrance back in **Avengers** 6.

"There will be a re-establishment of the Masters of Evil," Stern reveals. "Maybe we'll even find out why they call themselves that. It's sort of an odd name to give yourself. 'Hey, we're the bad guys!' Some of the original members have died or gone on to something else by now so we'll have one or two veterans from the old team and a few new ones.

"Also a couple of new adversaries for the Avengers will be coming in. One of them I'm not sure you'd call a villain per se, but definitely an opponent—someone who will give them a hard time.

"Mark Gruenwald and I are talking about doing an annual crossover between the **Avengers Annual** and the new **West Coast Avengers Annual**. The first would involve the High Evolutionary and a few other things. That's still in the planning stages right now."

Roger Stern is excited about writing for the legendary art team of Buscema and Palmer. Their issues in the late Sixties remain a high water mark in Avengers history.

"I was talking to John Buscema just last week and he's a lot of fun to work with. So is Tom. John always makes a big deal about not liking superheroes, but I've talked to him and he's enjoying himself. Otherwise he wouldn't do the stuff he does. He's a joy to work with! I say, 'Hey, John, draw this!' and he does and it's beautiful! Everything you could want and more. I have to pinch myself sometimes. I'm working on this and I'm saying, 'Wow, it's the Avengers by John Buscema and Tom Palmer! And I'm writing it! Whoa, how did that happen?'"

## AND NOW. . . THE WEST COAST AVENGERS!

Since The Avengers operate under bylaws, they have a size limit which restricts them to no more than six members. Before that rule was instituted, the team often swelled to a dozen members. . . and at times even more. But now each group of Avengers operates at the six member limit.

The West Coast Avengers current membership consists of Hawkeye, Mockingbird, Iron Man, Wonder Man and Tigra with the sixth member yet to be decided. On an informal basis, both the Thing and Firebird are, as writer Steve Englehart puts it, "Hanging out with them." Hank Pym (formerly known as Ant Man-Giant Man-Goliath-and Yellow Jacket) is on hand as the group's general manager.

The lineup for **The West Coast Avengers** was arrived at before Steve Englehart came on line as author. "I know that editor Mark Gruenwald has great affection for Hawkeye and Mockingbird and that there was a desire to have a balance of males and females, a balance of power and so forth," states Englehart.

"The characters which are appearing only in this title are mine to work with. That's always been true with the Avengers set up," Englehart explains. "Characters that appear in their own titles are the province of the writer who handles those series. The only thing you can do is exemplify the situation being done in their book. In my stint on the east coast Avengers, I tried to play up the fact that Iron Man and Captain America were good friends; that sort of thing. But it was not really my place as a team book writer to start making up things for Iron Man. The ones that are only in the **Avengers** are totally mine. they become the focal point of the book."

Just as Stern is lining up Kang and setting on who and what he is, Englehart is unraveling Tigra.

"My feeling when I took over the book was that it had a lot of potential," Englehart explains. "Over the years, both Tigra and Wonder Man have acquired a lot of

-- ONCE HE MAKES UP HIS MIND, WONDER MAN'S BELT-JETS DEVOUR DISTANCE!
AND WONDER MAN HIMSELF LAUGHS AT WALLS!
KA-RUMP!
THE ONE WHO FEARS ME!
YOU MADE A SUPERHUMAN EFFORT TO OVERCOME THAT FEAR ONCE, WONDER MAN, K BUT I DOUBT YOU CAN DO IT TWICE!
YOU'RE OUT OF TOUCH, ROBOT! I'VE COME A LONG WAY SINCE THEN!
HE LAUGHS AT MORE THAN WALLS NOW--
© 1985 Marvel Comics Group
K AVENGERS #163.

negative baggage. There were periods where those people would join the Avengers and stand around for six issues, not really fitting into the book. Or worse, they'd say, 'We're no good as Avengers' and leave. Since that happened to both of them several times they became locked into people's perceptions as spectacular failures. But they have the potential to be really good characters.

"There may be a number of reasons why Tigra never really knocked the world dead. One thing that I can do when I come in is say that none of that happened; we'll start over. The first thing is to rehabilitate them and make them live up to their potential. I set out to look into Tigra and see what made her interesting and present a new origin for her. More than an origin. Over the years we've seen her origin in bits and pieces. I wanted to put it into context, showing how she came to what she is and what it means to her now as well as what it may mean to her in the future.

"She's very upset about having her soul split into two parts, being both a young, feminist female and a kind of 'girls-just-want-to-have-fun' tabby cat. She wants to rid herself of one of those personalities, the tiger personality. Of course she finds that that's real difficult to do. This plays itself out over a couple of issues."

## WONDER MAN & THE THING

Englehart feels that Wonder Man has been especially abused over the years since his introduction in **Avengers** 9.

"For a long time people have been saying that Wonder Man could be Marvel's Superman. He's this really amazing character. But somehow or other he took this turn where he's afraid of death and is falling apart at the wrong time. On more than one occasion he's said, 'I'm a failure. I'm no good at this. I'm leaving.' It's hard to think of a guy as a sympathetic lead character if he keeps telling you that he's really not any good! I went back and dug into him to clear up these phobias. Shooter had cleared it up ten years ago, but then other people had him backslide.

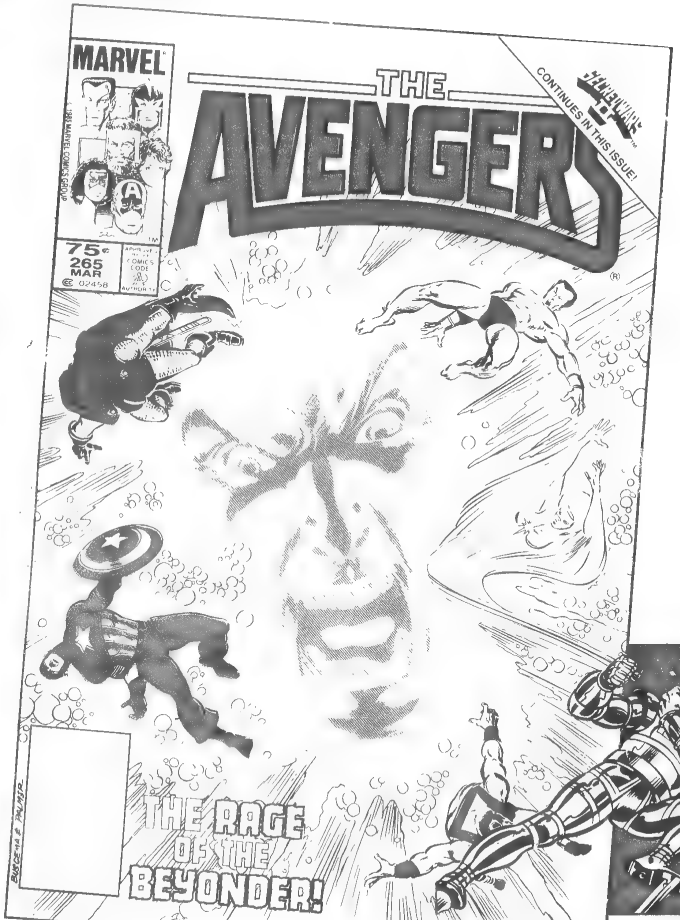
"Having gotten out of the starting gate with the **West Coast Avengers**, issue by issue I'm having him more aware of just how powerful and successful he can be. One thing I'm doing is having him get a major co-starring role in **Conan IV** with Arnold Schwarzenegger, which is life imitating reality imitating life. I figured that if Arnold could go from body building into being a Hollywood star, then Wonder Man could go from an Avenger into being a movie star. I'll have a wonderful time playing this out as his success starts to fall into place."

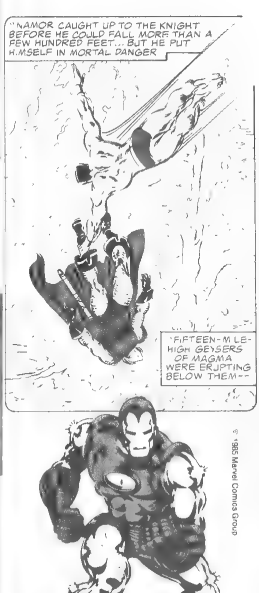
Which brings us up to the Thing. Having quit the Fantastic Four, he went clear across the country and is hanging out with the **West Coast Avengers**. While it was originally planned to make him a member, the cancellation of the Thing's individual title has caused other plans to be worked up, not all of which Englehart is free to reveal.

"I think that we'll be seeing some of them by the time this interview appears," Englehart explains. "We're playing it a little more trickily, but Hawkeye really gets into the idea. He knows they'll really fall down back East when he's able to call them up and tell them that he's hired the Thing. But the Thing doesn't want to join. He was just with the F.F. and he's not interested. I can't say what effect the cancellation of his title has, but it does change plans that I had made."

Firebird wants to fill the final open slot as a full-fledged Avenger, but she has to contend with Hawkeye's eagerness to sign up the Thing, former member of the world's premiere hero team.

By nature, she is someone who would enjoy being in a superhero team," says Englehart. "Unfortunately she has shown up at the Avengers right at the time that Hawkeye has walked off with the Thing. No matter what she does, nobody pays any at-


MARVEL
75¢
265
MAR
02458
THE AVENGERS
CONTINUES IN THIS ISSUE!
THE RAGE OF THE BEYONDER!


"NAMOR CAUGHT UP TO THE KNIGHT BEFORE HE COULD FALL MORE THAN A FEW HUNDRED FEET... BUT HE PUT HIMSELF IN MORTAL DANGER
"FIFTEEN-MILE-HIGH GEYSERS OF MAGMA WERE ERUPTING BELOW THEM--

**FILLED WITH EXPLOSIVE ACTION**

tention to her. She's quite frustrated by all this. On the other hand, she's a very moral and long-suffering woman and bears this cross silently."

**THE AVENGERS—THEN AND NOW**

Steven Englehart wrote the original **Avengers** comic in the Seventies. He brings that perspective to the new spin-off series.

"I've written a number of different teams over the years. While the Justice League of America (the original lineup) comes close to being like the Avengers, they're more a group of like-minded individuals. I always get the feeling that the JLA is working together because they are the major heroes of Earth and just get together when needed. The Avengers started out that way but it's become a group of comrades—people work in the Avengers best if they fit in with the people involved. Those who have trouble fitting in generally don't last for long. As more and more people have gotten to be Avengers, it works for them to put together two groups. The Avengers is a way for a lot of friends to get together and do something worthwhile."

Englehart doesn't think that the **West Coast Avengers** is just a carbon copy of the regular **Avengers** comic.

"I wrote the east coast Avengers back when they were the only Avengers. There is a difference between the two groups. The east coast Avengers are a more traditional group just as the East Coast/West Coast general outlook. The East Coasters are more concerned with tradition and with raw power. The West Coast Avengers, by the nature of the West Coast and of the characters themselves, are all a little bit whacko." But Steve is quick to point out that "They are still Avengers and will still take on anybody that the other group can take on.

"I have written a lot of different teams over the years. What I always try to do is get into the heads of the people involved and let them set the tone. I think that my JLA was different from my Avengers. Now I'm getting to do Avengers level action again, but these guys are telling more jokes and having more fun at it. They're creating a legend here. The East Coast group, even if it's made up of Hawkeye, the Beast and every joker in town, still has a reputation and a legend to live up to.

"The West Coast Avengers is just an extension of the Avengers. These people *are* Avengers. Yet for the first time they're forming a second group in a town which they haven't spent a lot of time in. They're living amongst different situations—palm trees, swimming pools, movie stars. I see a pretty big difference between the two groups while never forgetting that they are all Avengers. There's something good about being an Avenger, something that is really positive and that's one of the things that sets them apart from any of the other groups. It's an honor to be an Avenger and people have to live up to that honor. The West Coast Avengers understand that but at the same time really feel that this is an opportunity to create an Avengers in their own image.

"Iron Man is the only East Coast type who's been a leader. Everybody else has always been among the second rank. Hawkeye has been around so long that you might call him first rank, but he's a little less developed than Thor, Captain America and Iron Man. Beyond that, Mockingbird is new, Tigra and Wonder Man are self-confessed failures from before and the Thing and Firebird are not really a part of it. It's their chance to show what they can do, but nobody can be an Avenger and still be real second rate. These guys have just as much right to be called Avengers as any member of the East Coast group. They're looser, that's all."

**WEST COAST HIGHLIGHTS**

The new team is still working itself out with many surprises and twists.

As Englehart relates, the series is running the origin of Tigra as a subtext to the proceedings.

"The sixth issue concentrates on Tigra while the seventh concentrates on Hank Pym and Wonder Man. That issue also deals with Firebird, as does the eighth issue. The ninth has to do with the Thing and comes out in the same month that the Thing's own title gets cancelled. All that leads into what happens in issue ten."

Englehart is aware of the problems that can happen when one character in a team overshadows the others and pushes them into the background.

"One of the objections I've heard about team books," relates Englehart, "is that some of them are not really team books. I will concentrate on everybody else while something like the Wonder Man storyline is going on. That's all that I can tell you about the general directions that it's going in because they are still forming their group identity. As Tigra and Wonder Man become more and more major players along with the Thing and Firebird, and as Hawkeye and the rest do their time on stage, every issue moves along. We're not getting to a plateau because these people are changing all the time."

And so begins a new direction in the never-ending saga of The Avengers—both teams, *one* Avengers! CF

# Comics Consumer Guide

**MARVEL COMICS**

**SHIPPING 11/18/85**

**Wonderman 1**—Michelinie/Gamill/Colletta.

**SHIPPING 11/26/85**

**G.I. Joe Yearbook**

**SHIPPING 12/3/85**

**Daredevil 222**—Frank Miller/Mazzucchelli.

**New Mutants 36**—Claremont/Wilshire/Sienkiewicz.

**Squadron Supreme 6**—Gruenwald/Hall/De la Rosa. Issue 8 of 12 issues.

**The Thing 34**—Carlin/Ryan/Akin & Garvey.

**Web of Spider-Man 13**—David/Harris/Baker.

**West Coast Avengers 7**—Englehart/Milgrom/Sinnott.

**Misty 3**— Trina Robbins. Issue 3 of 6.

**Strawberry Shortcake 7**

**Santa Claus 1**—Jacobson/Springer. Issue 1 Of 3. Reprinting the super special.

**Thundercats 3**—Michelinie/Mooney/Breeding.

**Young Astronauts 1**—O'Neil/Brigman/Redding.

**SHIPPING 12/10/85**

**Alpha Flight 33**—Mantlo/S. Buscema (layouts)/Talaoc (finishes).

**Captain America 316**—Gruenwald/Neary/Janke.

**Doctor Strange 76**—Gillis/Badger (layouts)/Warner (pencils)/Emberlin (inks).

**Firestar 2**—DeFalco/Wilshire. Issue 2 of 4.

**Groo the Wanderer 14**—Aragones/with Evanier. An Epic direct & newsstand comic.

**Micronauts 19**—Gillis/Jones/Bulanadi.

**Power Pack 21**—Writing debut of Terry Austin. Art by Brent Anderson/Terry Austin.

**Vision/Scarlet Witch 7**—Englehart/Howell/Mooney. Issue 7 of 12 issues.

**Amazing Spider-Man 275**—Defalco/Franz/Rubenstein man/Perez/Tanghal/Bolland

**Fantastic Four Index 5**

**The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe 5**

**Savage Sword of Conan 122**—Kraar/Chan.

**Bozz Chronicles 2**—Michelinie/Blevins.

**Sisterhood of Steel 8**—Marx/Vosberg.

**Heathcliff 7**—Gallagher/Kremer/Roettcher.

**SHIPPING 12/17/85**

**Avengers 266**—Stern/J. Buscema/Palmer.

**Conan the Barbarian 181**—Owsley/J. Buscema/Camp.

**Eternals 7**—Gillis/S. Buscema.

**G.I. Joe 46**—Hama/Whigham/Mushynsky.

**Incredible Hulk 318**—Byrne (writer/pencils)/Williams.

**Marvel Tales 186**—Lee/Romita/Esposito. Riprints *Spider Man 46*.

**The Punisher 4**—S. Grant/Zeck/Beatty. Issue 4 of 5.

**X-Men 204**—Claremont/Romita Jr./Williamson.

**Marvel Saga 5**

**Dreadstar 23**—Starlin.

**Fraggle Rock 7**—Kay/Severin.

**SHIPPING 12/24/85**

**Elfquest 9**—Wendy & Richard Pini. An Epic direct & newsstand comic.

**Fantastic Four 289**—Byrne (writer/pencils)/Sinnott.

**Iron Man 205**—O'Neil/Bright/Akin & Garvey.

**Peter Parker 113**—David/Von Eden

**Thor 366**—Simonson

**Transformers 15**—Budiansky/Oerlin/Gordon.

**X-Factor 3**—Layton (story/inks)/Gulce.

**Marvel Team-Up Index 3**

**Dr. Who 19**

**Alien Legion 12**—Zelenetz/Stroman/Emberlin.

**Six From Sirius II 3**—Moench/Gulacy (painted). Issue 3 of 4.

**Droids 1**—Manak/Romita Sr./Garzon.

**Top Dog 7**—Jacobson/Kremer/Roettcher.

**THE FOLLOWING COMPANIES SELL DIRECT ONLY.**

**COMICO**

**Robotech, the New Generation 4**

**Elementals 5**

**Mage 10**

**Next Man 6**

**Robotech, the Macross Saga 8**

**EAGLE**

**2000 A.D. 1**

**Judge Dredd: The Early Cases 3**

**Judge Dredd 30**

**Strontium Dog 5**

**ECLIPSE**

**The Official Teen Titans Index 5**—Final issue.

**Alien Encounters 4**

**Mr. Monster 4**

**Seduction of the Innocent 3**

**Pelleas & Melisande 1**—Issue 1 of 2

**The Masked Man 7**

**3-D DNAgents 1**

**Pelleas & Melisande 2**—Last issue.

**Sun-Runners 7**

**Miracleman 4**

**The New DNAgents 4**

**Laser Eraser and Pressbutton 2**

**Paradox 1**—One-shot.

**FIRST**

**Nexus Graphic Novel**

**Nexus 19**

**Elric: Sailor on the Seas of Fate 6**

**Grimjack 21**

**The Original E-Man and Michael Mauser 7**

**American Flagg 28**

**Shatter 3**

**Jon Sable, Freelance 35**

**First Adventures 5**

**KITCHEN SINK**

**Death Rattle Vol. 2 Number 2**

**Megaton Man 7**

## DC COMICS

### SHIPPING 12/10/85

**DC Comics Presents 92**—Kupperberg/Swan/Hunt. Superman & Vigilante.

**Best of DC Digest 71**—Last issue/ Various writers and artists.

**Justice League of America 249**—Conway/McDonnell/Wray/ Girodano.

**Fury of Firestorm 46**—Conway/ Brozowski/Machlan.

**Hex 8**—Fleisher/R. Wagner/Garzon.

**Tales of the Teen Titans 64**—Wolfman/Perez/Bolland.

**Legionnaires Three 3**—(Miniseries) Giffen/Newell/Colon/Kesel

**Vigilante 28**—($1.50) Kupperberg/ T. Smith/Magyar/Sienkiewicz. Introducing the *new* Vigilante! Direct sales only.

**The Outsiders 6**—($1.50) Barr/ Aparo. Direct sales only.

### SHIPPING 12/17/85

**Batman 394**—Moench/Gulacy.
**Superman 418**—Bates/Swan/Hunt

**Star Trek 25**—Duane/Sutton/Villagren/Starlin.

**Amethyst 14**—Giffen/Colon/ Kesel.

**Aquaman 3**—Pozner/Hamilton/ Montano/Russell.

**Secret Origins 1 (Superman)**—R. Thomas/Boring/Ordway.

**'Mazing Man 4**—Rozakis/DeStefano/Kesel.

**Elvira's House of Mystery 2**—Cavalieri/Oksner/Bolland.

**Omega Men 37**—($1.50) Klein/McManus. Direct sales only.

**Legion of Super-Heroes 21**—($1.50) Levitz/LaRocque/Mahlstedt. Direct sales only.

**Shadow of the Batman 5**—($1.75) Last issue. Wein/Rogers/Giordano. Direct sales only. Reprint.

### SHIPPING 12/24/85

**Swamp Thing 47**—Moore/Woch/ Randall/Bissette/Totleben.

**Batman and the Outsiders 32**—Barr/ Davis.

**Green Lantern 199**—Englehart/Staton/Patterson.

**Sgt. Rock 409**—Kanigher/Gonzales/Kubert.

**Warlord 104**—Fleisher/R. Randall/Grell.

**Blue Devil 23**—Cohn/Mishkin/ Kupperberg/Magyar/Cullins/ Martin. Crossover with *Firestorm* 46.

**Who's Who 14**

**Booster Gold 3**

**Infinity, Inc. 25**—R. & D. Thomas/ McFarlane/DeZuniga. Direct sales only.

**The New Teen Titans 19**—Wolfman/ Barreto/Tanghal. Direct sales only.

### SHIPPING 1/7/86

**Tales of the Legion of Super-Heroes 334**—Levitz/Lightle/Mahlstedt.

**Action 578**—Boldman/Schaffenberger.

**Detective 561**—Moench/Colan/B. Smith/Giordano.

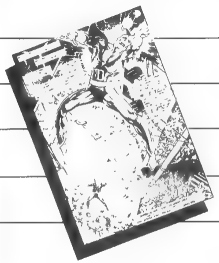
**All-Star Squadron 56**—R. Thomas/ Clark/Colletta/DeZuniga.

**V 15**—Bates/Infantino/DeZuniga /Bingham.

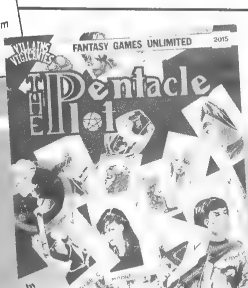
**Deadman 2**—Helfer/Garcia-Lopez.

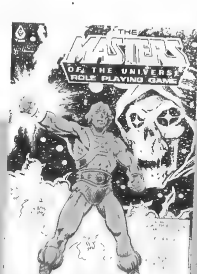
**DC Challenge 6**—Maggin/Jurgens/ Mahlstedt Direct sales only.

**Atari Force Special 1**—Helfer/ Rogers/Garcia-Lopez



Continued from page 11




Unfortunately, just how you play the game is not entirely clear. Ross Babcock designed the game, but comics veteran Jack Harris wrote the comic. I don't know if Jack plays role-playing games, but he probably hasn't had to explain how to play one before.

This game is supposed to appeal to newcomers, but jargon such as "Movement Points" is not explained well at all—leaving it up to the interpretation of the player. The classic (and, I'm sure, intended) prohibition against "saving" movement points from one move to the next is not made.

Similarly, just how Skeletor and his monsters move and attack is not well explained. There is no provision for a gamemaster in these rules, just the players against a random setup for the villains. Does the player roll dice both for his character and the attacking monster? Does another player handle the dice for the attacking monster? The rules state that the monsters are intelligent and will make intelligent decisions if confronted with quandries. Who is supposed to make these decisions?

The combat rules are scattered throughout the rule book and then finally summarized (seemingly as an afterthought) in the last few pages. The combat rules further confuse the issue of just who is playing, as they call for both attacker and defender to roll dice, but nowhere indicate who is supposed to be playing the attacker and/or defender.

The map the game is played on is colorfully printed on card stock. The rules provide a room guide with numbers and descriptions. There are no numbers on the map and the descriptions are not exact enough to be able to pinpoint each one. On the map, almost every room has items, such as weapons, and/or enemies, such as robots. These have a definite effect on the game, which is a good touch. If you wander into the robot storeroom, you run into robots.

Unfortunately, this map, by necessity, is wide open to the players. If they don't want to go into the room with the robots, they can see it and avoid it. Many of the rooms have starburst designs on the walls. Are these the "magic doors" mentioned throughout the rules? Perhaps, but there is no direct description in the rules to show this. The comic book format would seem to encourage accurate pictures of game elements, but the final result does not take advantage of this aspect. Dice are not included either.

I think this game will sell well, but it will never win any high marks for quality. If you have a small He-Man fan in the family, he might get a kick out of it, especially if you take the time to play it with him. Don't look for great adventure simulation though.

**LEGACY OF EAGLES**

A few issues back we looked at Games Workshop's *Golden Heroes*, the British entry onto the superhero game scene. Now I have their first full-scale adventure before me: *Legacy of Eagles*.

This 24-page, shrink-wrapped, adventure includes two two-sided maps. One features the deck plan of a submarine on one side and part of an underwater base on the other. The other features a street layout on one side and further areas of the base on the other. For all the NPC (Non-Player Characters) there are cards with all the vital statistics and cardstock figures to be cut out and used on the maps.

The adventure involves a criminal plot to enter and loot the newly discovered undersea base of a superhero group of the Sixties who, except for one now-schizophrenic member, disappeared in 1965. These heroes are the Eagles of the title; no doubt a tribute to Eagle Comics, the British comics publisher whose artists decorate the book with their work.

Player-characters learn of this attempt from the criminal known as the Overlord. Through various possible trails, depending on how well they do in early sections of the plot, they end up at the base in time to find out just what caused the Eagles to suddenly drop out of sight.

It's a good adventure, with the added highlight of providing the heroes with a

nice underwater base if they need it. It is intended for beginning heroes and in general does its job well.

Fans of Brian Bolland's work will like the cover, which features two of the villains of the piece crawling out of a pile of futuristic machinery. Lesser-known lights of the British comic-art scene turn in pieces for the inside which should be the envy of any American superhero game producer except, possibly, Mayfair.

I recommend this adventure for *Golden Heroes* players and suggest that other superhero game players look into it for ideas on both plotting and settings.

### THE PENTACLE PLOT

*Villains and Vigilante*'s latest offering is by Stefan Jones, the author of the previous V&V collection of villains called **Opponents Unlimited**. The adventure uses one "suite" of a villain group called "Tarot" which was partially described in the previous volume. Unlike *Opponents Unlimited,* which was a fairly lighthearted effort, *The Pentacle Plot* is serious throughout.

Our heroes must first investigate a sudden power blackout. They will probably discover that the blackout is part of an effort to charge up a monstrous tank devised by the Pentagon to deal with potential superpowered attacks and stolen by Tarot.

From this encounter the heroes will team of Tarot's local headquarters, home of a few of the "Major Arcana" from Tarot and the Pentacle suite. This seemingly routine headquarters-busting expedition can suddenly throw the heroes into another world entirely—a semi-fantasy world in which Tarot is helping the suppressive theocracy of Grell dominate the merely oppressive feudal culture of Hessel.

This conflict leads the heroes into the major rules innovation of this adventure book, battle combat for V & V. Or: how to figure out what is happening between the armies while the supertypes slug it out with each other.

These battle rules seem quite complete for their purpose, and may make the adventure worth getting for V & V players who normally don't buy pre-planned adventures.

For *Champions* players, this book repeates the "V & V to Champions" article printed in *Most Wanted 3.* As I mentioned in the review of that book, this version of the article is not the final one that George MacDonald and I sent to Fantasy Games Unlimited. It has most of the main ideas straight, and serves pretty well for translating characters. Unfortunately, the villains presented in this particular volume translate as pretty wimpy compared to most *Champions* characters. A Gamemaster who wants to translate these characters should be ready to add a few points here and there to bring the villains up to snuff against the prospective heroes.

### BATTLEDROIDS BECOME BATTLETECH

*Battledroids*, which I mentioned several columns ago, is undergoing a name change. George Lucas managed to persuade FASA that he owns the name "droid." The next edition of the game will be titled *Battletech.* Now we get to see if the *Robotech* people, Harmony Gold, think they have a lock on the term "tech."

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

*Stormbringer, Call of Cthulhu* and *Elfquest* Chaosium, Inc. P.O. Box 6302, Albany, CA. 94706

*Villains and Vigilantes* Fantasy Games Unlimited, P.O. Box 182, Roslyn, N.Y. 11578

*Battledroids, Dr. Who, Star Trek Role Playing,* and *the Masters of the Universe Role Playing Game,* FASA, P.O. Box 6930, Chicago, IL 60680-6930

*Golden Heroes* Games Workshop Ltd., London NW10, England.

*Champions* Hero Games, 92A 21st Ave. San Mateo, CA. 94402

*DC Heroes* Mayfair Games, Inc. P.O. Box 48539, Niles, IL. 60648-0539

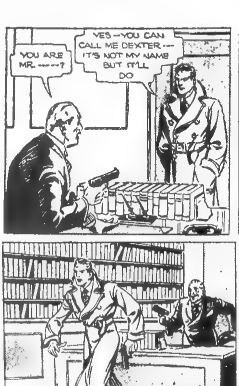
*Marvel Super Heroes* TSR Inc., P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva, WI. 53147 CF

## SECRET AGENT X-9

*Continued from page 25*

up just as I was starting to sketch. I didn't get back to my place til four the next morning . . . and I had to be at King Features at seven." Gould met Walsh at the syndicate with a typed list of names and a drawing of two heads, side and front view of "a blond version of my *Secret Agent X-9* submission." Walsh was initially unhappy, but then thought of a way to solve the problem. "He lit up one of his fumigating ropes and then started to trim the drawings with a pair of scissors. 'I'm gonna tell Connolly that you brought in a batch of stuff and then I cut these out so he wouldn't have to waste time lookin' at the others.' "

Several weeks passed and Will Gould heard nothing about either his X-9 samples or the idea for a new detective strip to be called *Red Barry*. "One morning I got a call from Connolly asking me to drop in at a specified hour. When I got to his office, Alex Raymond and Dashiell Hammett were there. Connolly got quickly to the point: 'I'm gonna give you guys a chance to make some dough. Will, Alex is gonna draw *X-9*. You go ahead with *Red Barry*.' " Gould never mentioned what his starting salary was, but Raymond kept getting $20 per week during his first months on *X-9*.

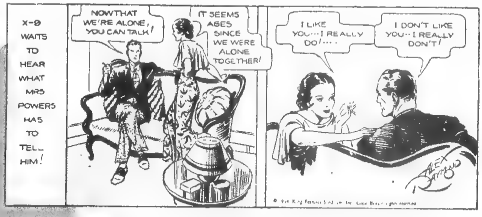

YES--YOU CAN CALL ME DEXTER.--IT'S NOT MY NAME BUT IT'LL DO
YOU ARE MR.----?
SIT DOWN, MR.--AH--DEXTER--I'VE SENT FOR YOU TO TRY TO PREVENT ONE OF THE MOST HORRIBLE CRIMES EVER PLANNED---DO YOU KNOW OF A MAN WHO IS CALLED "THE TOP" BY HIS--?
SH-H-H!
SET UP? YOU'RE GOING TO GET HOUSEMA'D'S KNEE THAT WAY!

### HAMMETT WRITES

By 1934 Hammett was garnering considerable slick-paper attention. A former Pinkerton detective, he had started writing for the pulpwood magazines in the early 1920s. He did most of his work for *Black Mask*, and it was in this pulp that *The Maltese Falcon*—the work that introduced Sam Spade—*The Glass Key* and his series of stories and novels about the Continental Op first appeared. Knopf began bringing out his pulp novels in book form in 1929. His last novel, *The Thin Man*, was featured in *Redbook* in 1933. The hardcover version came out in January, 1934, simultaneous with the advent of the *X-9* strip. The photo of Hammett on the book jacket, with him looking a great deal like the dapper William Powell, was also used in the King Features promotions. Such then-prestigious literary figures as Alexander Woolcott and Sinclair Lewis raved about the Thin Man novel, and these raves were quoted in the X-9 ads.

Hammett biographer William F. Nolan says, "Hammett combined the Op and Sam Spade in the character of X-9. He was cool, efficient, quick with a gun or a wisecrack and, like the Op, was a man without a name." Not only that, but during the first few weeks of the new strip it was even difficult to tell who X-9 was a secret agent for. Although he talks and acts like a pulp private eye when he is on a case, X-9 lives in a fashionable apartment and has a Filipino valet. When we first meet X-9 he is lounging in his apartment wearing a silk smoking jacket. The opening continuity involves him in protecting a millionaire. There are lurking hoods, an unfaithful wife, a crooked lawyer, crooked servants and a virginal blonde niece, along with some tough dialogue—"So you think this mug that Powers called is a dick, huh? O.K., we'll take care of him."

Hammett was mixing bits and pieces of several of his pulp stories, tossing in a little of *The Thin Man*. The police don't seem to have any idea what sort of secret agent X-9 is either. After several weeks he phones someone called the Chief to report what he's up to. The Chief, a plump businessman sort with a military moustache, appears in one panel. "That's funny," he is telling his associate, "X-9 called up and then stopped talking and rang off—Send a couple of the boys over there to see what's the matter." This is the last we hear of the Chief, his dapper associate or the boys. Eventually, after Hammett had quit the strip and G-Men had become nationally popular, it was revealed that X-9 was with the FBI.


X-9 WAITS TO HEAR WHAT MRS POWERS HAS TO TELL HIM!
NOW THAT WE'RE ALONE, YOU CAN TALK!
IT SEEMS AGES SINCE WE WERE ALONE TOGETHER!
I LIKE YOU--I REALLY DO!....
I DON'T LIKE YOU--I REALLY DON'T!

WHY MUST WE BE ENEMIES?
ONE REASON MIGHT BE THAT THE LAST TIME I SAW YOU, YOU TRIED TO HIRE A GUY TO KILL ME!
I KNOW -- AND I'M SORRY! I WAS ANGRY--I DIDN'T REALLY MEAN IT!
HOOEY!

# SECRET AGENT

## RAYMOND DRAWS

Alexander Gillespie Raymond commenced the X-9 strip just two weeks after his *Flash Gordon* Sunday page had made its first appearance. Although he'd never signed a strip before, Raymond's work had been appearing in newspapers for the past couple of years. His last job before soloing on strips of his own was ghosting Lyman Young's *Tim Tyler's Luck*. That had followed periods of assisting on *Blondie* and *Tillie the Toiler*. How early Raymond wanted to be an artist is difficult to determine from the biographical accounts, since he seems to have varied his life story for each interview. "I had no idea I would ever be an artist," he told one questioner. "When I was eighteen years old I went to work in a Wall Street brokerage office and was a sad onlooker at the Crash of 1929. After losing my job there, I tried to solicit renewals for mortgages, but this business was so bad that I soon quit and went to work for Russ Westover." Raymond told another interviewer that he'd wanted to be an artist from childhood on.

He certainly nurtured a longtime ambition to be a magazine illustrator, one that he didn't give up even after newspaper strips had brought him acclaim and income. A major influence on him was slick illustrator Matt Clark, whose larger-than-life heroes, slim women and drybrush inking technique Raymond adopted for **Flash Gordon**, **Jungle Jim** and **Secret Agent X-9**. While Raymond did an impressive job on the Hammett daily, he never developed a way of making his narrative flow from panel to panel. What he delivers is a handsome series of individual illustrations, each nicely composed and rendered, each a bit stiff and posed looking. His X-9 is handsome and lithe, in the Flash Gordon mode, and even many of his thugs and gunmen give the impression they're ac-

FANCY YOUR TURNING UP HERE, DEXTER, JOVE··· YOU'RE WOUNDED!
IS THAT NEWS TO YOU, ? WELL, HERE'S SOME MORE
HERE'S THE TWIN OF YOUR CIGARETTE HOLDER! YOU DROPPED THIS ONE WHEN YOU KONAPPED EVELYN!
YOU!
THE TOP!
QUITE RIGHT-- BUT YOU WON'T LIKE TO TELL IT DEXTER!

tually male models dressed up for a costume party. His drawing never quite matched the gritty, side-of-the-mouth dialogue that Hammett was trying to utilize in his continuities.

**PROBLEMS**

Hammett's working habits at the time may account for his not doing a first-rate job on the strip. Will Gould has described a visit he made to Hammett's hotel suite, at the suggestion of the syndicate, to get some advice on his own strip.
"We did everything but talk comic strips," Gould recalled. "I kept mixing Bacardi and ginger ales for friends who were continually dropping in. Producers, songwriters, artists, and—most of all—Lillian Hellman, who lived in the same hotel . . .Hammett poured drinks and we went into a session that lasted far into the night. Mostly about fighters . . . It was past midnight before we stopped . . . He was beginning to slur his words, and his speech wandered. I helped put him to bed." There have been rumors in recent years that Hammett may have farmed out the writing of the strip to one or more of his less well-off **Black Mask** contemporaries. By 1935 he was off the strip. According to a magazine account at the time, Hammett was fired by Connolly "when he lagged behind schedule with ideas that lacked the power of his printed work." Raymond kept on with the strip for awhile, using scripts provided by none other than Leslie Charteris, creator of The Saint. In the autumn of 1935 Raymond left **X-9** to concentrate on his Sunday strips.

**FLANDERS DRAWS, CHARTERIS WRITES**

As of the strip dated November 18, 1935, Charles Flanders became the artist. Our secret agent remained the same tall, handsome fellow he was under Raymond. He went in for double-breasted suits and trenchcoats and he still struck fashion model poses. Then in his twenties, Flanders had been in the King bullpen since 1932. He'd drawn a heroic, stylized **Robin Hood** Sunday page for King earlier in 1935, but it had a brief career. He also moonlighted for Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson's pioneering **More Fun Comics**, drawing a serialized version of **Ivanhoe** in a style somewhat akin to that of Howard Pyle. For X-9 he did the first of his Raymond impersonations, working in the drybrush he'd later use on **King of the Royal Mounted** and **The Lone Ranger**. While Flanders was able to emulate Raymond's drawing and inking techniques, he had trouble initially duplicating his compositions. His figures tended to huddle around in the middle of awkward settings, never quite fitting into the pictures.

While the Leslie Charteris continuities were a shade lighter than those of Hammett, there was little of the devil-may-care attitude and bright dialogue that was to be found in the Saint stories. He inherited Sydney George Harper Carp, a plump windbag who acted as X-9's sidekick, and added no major characters of his own. X-9 and his associates don't limit themselves to interstate crimes or those involving national security, but dabble in whatever strikes their fancy. This includes tracking down the mastermind, known only as the Fixer, of a gang of jewel thieves and solving the mystery of the Phantom Plane. In an early story X-9 spots an English character as a phony because he's wearing a lifeguard's tie while claiming to have been in the Horse Guards. Something the British-raised Charteris would also have noticed. Charteris devoted only a few months to the strip and after his departure the author credit went to Robert Storm.

**ROBERT STORM—A HOUSE NAME WRITES**

Tired of the shifting personnel on the strip, the editors had decided that at least one thing about the strip would remain constant. So they made up a writer's name to attach to **Secret Agent X-9**. The person who did most of the scripting under the Robert Storm alias was Max Trell, a former newsman and movie scriptwriter. He'd been working as a writer, off and on, since the 1920s and had even ghosted two autobiographies for little Shirley Temple. In the 1940s he'd get a credit on the **Dick's Adventures** Sunday page.

During the Flanders-Storm period, the strip came out and admitted X-9 was with the FBI. His chief became a dead ringer for J. Edgar Hoover and more sophisticated crimefighting and detecting techniques started showing up in the stories. X-9 relied on fingerprints, use of the FBI's lab and records facilities.

He took a turn for the worse in April of 1938, when Flanders was switched to the **King of the Royal Mounted** strip and Nicholas Afonsky assumed the drawing chores. **CF**

**NEXT ISSUE:** More adventures of X-9 as we continue to play musical artists and writers

# FUN & PROFIT

BY MIKE BENTON

# THE SIX STAGES OF COLLECTING

You read comics for one reason: you like them. Now that's simple enough, but tell me why you *collect* them?

"You comic book collectors must be crazy," a dealer and appraiser of fine antiques once told me. "You spend hundreds of dollars for a cheaply printed booklet that's going to fall apart in thirty years. Why do you do it?"

I met another gentleman who was in his late fifties. He was and is a life-long *reader* of comic books. I see him at conventions with his hands continually in the boxes of cheap "Four For A Dollar" comics.

"If I haven't read it, I'll buy it," he told me, "but I don't pay collectors' prices because I just want to read the darn things. Who are you collectors saving them for anyway? Every year I give my comics to my nephews who read them to pieces, and I've never wasted a cent on those heavy plastic sandwich bags you guys pack them away in."

Well, obviously not everybody who enjoys and reads comics actually collects them, but many of us do. Collecting in this case is defined as the systematic acquisition and study of comic books and comic art, and not just the accumulation of a random assortment of titles or issues.

We may read comics for a hundred different personal justifications, but there are really only *six* general reasons for collecting them:

## 1

**Enjoyment of a particular character, title, or artist.** This is the obvious and first reason why people collect comics—they like them so much that they want every issue of a character or artist so they can extend and increase their reading pleasure. In other words, "If this month's issue of *X-Men* was so much fun, then I want to have them all!"

## 2

**Desire for a complete and total aesthetic experience.** Many comic collectors want back issues so that they can get the "total story" about their favorite character or even comic book company. For example, Marvel Comics' greatest appeal is for this group of collectors who want to read, understand and appreciate the entire Marvel Universe by accumulating all the comics that this company publishes.

Collectors in this category want to surround themselves with a richly textured world of fantasy which is provided by having a complete run of a title or company. This is the same type of desire that makes people record every episode of *Star Trek* or read and reread a fantasy series, such as *The Lord of the Rings*.

## 3

**Obsession with collecting.** some people are compulsive collectors. If it's not comic books, it's baseball cards, stamps, small furry animals or ceramic pigs. It's the collecting experience they enjoy—the finding, categorizing and storing away of a prized collectible is reward enough in itself.

These are the comic book completists—the people who brag that they only buy comics to have a complete collection, not because, God forbid, they actually want to *read* them.

**4**

**Desire to profit and speculate from a hobby.** Although this may seem to be a popular reason, very few people actually collect comic books simply for money *alone*. Why? Because quite frankly there are safer and more conventional collectibles that offer a more assured rate of return than comic books. If profit were thier only motive, these collectors would have departed for the greener fields of other hobbies.

The collectors who do collect *primarily* for profit are usually fans who have gradually lost their appreciation for reading comics, but they still want to keep their hand in. In other words, they now justify their collecting habit for monetary reasons.

**5**

**Wish to reestablish a connection with times past.** The first big boom in comic collecting back in the early 1960s came about because of the nostalgia and fond memories for the Golden Age comics of the 1940s. Collectors wanted those books they enjoyed in their childhood. Even today there are many collectors, young and old, who are looking for the *good* comics from their own past.

**6**

**Desire to study and appreciate an art form.** All collectors must eventually become scholars if they are ever to appreciate fully what they collect. Most advanced collectors are also researchers in the comic book field. They index artists' works, write the history of comic companies and discuss the development of major characters and trends in comic book history. Because of this interest, they must obtain and collect books for study and research.

Any and all of the above reasons are valid for collecting comics. It is the rare collector who only falls into one of these categories. It does seem that most collectors progress through *all* of these stages over the years.

Beginning and young collectors start out by trying to complete a set of comics that they happen to enjoy tremendously. Later they go for the "whole" experience and attempt to immerse themselves in all related titles and characters. This can develope into an obsession to get *all* the comic books they can handle. As the saturation point is reached and finances start to deplete, the collector may then turn to his collection for profit reasons in an attempt to raise money for buying more comics, or to justify the large amounts of money he has already spent.

Eventually, after a few months or years, he rekindles his interest in the comics that first started him collecting. From this newly rediscovered love of the medium comes about a deep and abiding appreciation of the entire comic book art form. He now becomes a student, a connoisseur, and an afficionado of the comic book *as* comic book.

Many of us get hung up at one stage or the other along the way. At times it does seem that collecting comic books alone can become selfish, self-centered and obsessive behavior that benefits no one but the collector himself.

Hopefully, at some point, the love and desire to collect and possess comic books evolves into an aesthetic appreciation of the art form.

When you reach this stage, then you've come to the glorious end. This is what collecting comics is all about! Then you *know* why you collect comics.

# HOT TIPS

**Since this column is now appearing on a monthly basis, a new feature called HOT TIPS will be featured each time. In this department, we'll discuss the upcoming "hot" books and titles you may wish to invest in, the market conditions for back issues and generally practical information that will help you turn a profit on your favorite hobby.**
**BE WARNED: No one has ever gotten rich by steadfastly following the advice of self-styled experts (myself including). There is no substitute for your own personal savvy, hunches and second-guesses.**

*HOT/TIP...* I know one dealer who is now buying heavily of the old back issues of *Howard the Duck* in anticipation of the new movie's release in the next year. Will those *Howard the Duck* number one's ever reach their old high value of $12 to $15? Don't hold your breath. Recent movies seem to have *nil* effect on back issue comic sales—witness the Superman, Swamp Thing, Supergirl, etc. movies of the past five years.

The last time any movie/tv show significantly affected comic book sales was *Batman* back in 1966—and that was only for the current newsstand issues. Strangely enough, related media seem to have little effect on *collector's* prices for comics.

*HOT/TIP...* It's No Miracle. By the time you read this, *Miracleman* number one, and the later issues, will have "taken off" and be fetching four to eight on the back issue market. Or collectors and speculators will have come to their senses and the issue will be selling for $2 to $3 tops.

Given the initial print run (about two to three times the hard-core collectors' market) and the fact that the comic is sold only in specialty comic shops, I place the true value of the first issues (after 6 months or so in the marketplace) at around $2.

It will be very surprising if this book lives up to all of its "hot, hot" hype. Sure, Alan Moore is great; Eclipse is doing some ground-breaking with the title—but, but...

So go easy on large multiple buys, but for sure pick up at least one copy of each issue—just to read, you understand. CF

YOU WON'T BELIEVE WHAT I'VE BEEN THROUGH...!
AFTER I LEFT YOU AN' TILLIE, I GOT ROPED INTO PERFORMING WITH AN EXOTIC DANCER--
--WHO TURNED OUT TO BE ANOTHER POP SYKE FREAK--!
WE'RE NOT FREAKS, HOWARD.
Steve Geise 7-3 for Geo&Cash

# HOT TIP

. . . Let's take a whirlwind tour of the major back issue comic markets for updates.

*GOLDEN AGE BOOKS:* All the really big money is going for the "Super Mint" key issues. There seems to be building resistance to paying money for mid-number and lower grade comics from the 1940s. DCs are where the action is at, although the early 1940s Timelys (particularly *Captain America*) are still pulling. Look for bargains in comics from 1946 to 1949—they're not selling at Guide, so ask for discounts!

*1950s Books:* At one time the super-hot comics from this time period were the Fox and Avon titles with GGA (that's "Good Gin Art," son) and art by Wally Wood, Basil Wolverton and all the EC artists. Now the run is on for the Pre-Code Horror titles from the minor companies—Harvey, Atlas (probably the most sought after), Merit, Ace and so on. The "horror" books have doubled and tripled in value over the last three years, and they're still quick sellers at conventions.

*Silver Age Books:* The strongest character right now is Batman! Back issues of *Detective* and *Batman*, especially the "10 cent" issues, are in high demand. The market for the 1960s to 1970s Marvel comics is still depressed, with the exception of *all* the *X-Men* issues and some of the Neal Adams books. The early (1-10) issues of *Daredevil* and *Fantastic Four* are moving in all grades, and *Spiderman* shows strength in all areas, with some weakness in the numbers 40 through 90.

*Recent Comics:* Look for Frank Miller books to re-establish the demand they had a year or so ago. His new work from DC on the Batman might be the major event of this year. *(Editor's Note: And don't overlook Miller's return to writing Daredevil which is making a big splash right now!)*

Watch out for the "Limited Series" from all companies. These have a history of being in high demand about half-way through and immediately after the series is completed. But a few months to a year after a limited series is finished, the individial books turn to dog meat.

And don't forget, kids—these things may be for "profit," but they were made for "fun." Enjoy! CF

# LETTERS

Address all correspondence to:

COMICS FEATURE
8399 Topanga Canyon Blvd., Suite 210
Canoga Park, CA 91304

Dear Whomever Reads Your Letters,

Well, if you don't have enough letter writers, maybe I can help a little by becoming a regular correspondent. Also, I'm not the only one I know that buys your magazine. I'll try to encourage some others to write.

One thing that I think would help bring interest to your letter column is giving it a title. Comic book columns carry them and it also adds to the appearance of the page. A couple of suggestions: FEATURED FANS (my personal favorite), or ALPHABET SOUP. If you don't like either of these, you can choose another or ask for other fans' suggestions.

As for content, I think your mag is excellent except for a minor annoyance. I know Marvel sells the best and Stan Lee writes a regular column, but this is no reason to be so prejudiced towards them as you seem to be. You need to feature more DC related interviews, etc. CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS is very popular, so why not do an article related totally on this new DC universe once the maxiseries is over. It could deal mainly with the changes brought about by the series.

And what about the independent companies such as First and Eclipse? A lot of people buy their books, too, so why not devote at least a few pages an issue to them?

Take Care.
Sincerely,
M.
Route 12, Box 142
Spartanburg, SC 29302

*I sure could use some regular letterhacks—M. Pleased to count you among them.*

*Your idea for a title for this section is a good one. So I'm throwing it open for reader suggestions—and the one we pick will win a free one year subscription.*

*While much of CF covers Marvel, there is certainly a lot of DC, strips, animation and all the rest as well. Of the last four HEROES columns, only one is a Marvel character. The others are about DC's Green Lantern and Dell's Brain Boy. Both this issue's and next issue's SILVER AGE cover a stage of DC history. All four on the GOLDEN AGE's concern DC characters. And there's always pieces on animation, comic strips, games and collecting. It hardly seems to be just Marvel.*

*There is already a major feature on the post-Crisis DC universe in the works. I do have one hesitation about the direct market comics, though. Most* Comics Feature *copies are sold outside of comics shops, in outlets that sell only Marvel, DC, Charlton and Archie. Do the majority of readers want pieces on Eclipse, First or the others? Let me know!*

Dear Feature People,

I only very recently began reading your magazine and have so far been fairly impressed. I personally couldn't care less if you had *any* color pages inside as long the articles and columns are high quality. (I believe my syntax is a little screwed in the preceding sentences, but you get the point.) Since you begged for letters, I'll proceed to do my best.

Whereas I can understand wanting to stick primarily to Marvel, if that's what your readership wants (as mentioned in issue 38), I feel you would actually be doing your readers a disservice if you cover the big 2 companies alone. I don't mean that you should devote a large portion of your magazine to the independent comics (other magazines do that), but some mention should be made.

At one time I collected Marvel with some DC and never even looked at anything else. Had I not had my curiosity piqued by letters, columns and articles in *Comics Buyer's Guide*, I would never have tried them and had my horizons expanded enormously. While I still buy and enjoy a number of comics from the big two, I find that many of the alternatives are higher in quality. (Can you imagine a comic like *Badger, American Flagg!* or *Mythadventures* coming from Marvel?)

Anyway, while I know that some fans are total Marvel maniacs and would not look at another company's book even if it were given to them, some are like I was and have either not considered it or are unsure where to begin. An excellent place to give the independent comics exposure would be in your review section, which brings me to my next criticism.

In any magazine I read, the reviews section is one of my favorites. Unfortunately that section is practically non-existent in the *Comics Feature*. In your review section you should give an indepth look at individual issues instead of a brief overview of a bunch of *titles*. I'm sure most companies would provide advance photo copies of issues for review if you would institute a review section and request them. Whether the reviewer's opinion agrees with mine or not as long as the reviews are well-written and well-considered, I love reading 'em. Many times a review has gotten me to try a comic I found that I loved.

Also in 38, in the "review" about *Crisis On Infinite Earths*, you imply that DC "jumped on the bandwagon" and copies Marvel's Secret Wars. Au contraire, the streamlining and events in *Crisis* have been in planning for DC's 50th anniversary for 3 or more years. If *Secret Wars* had been of equal craftsmanship, I would have assumed the two ideas had been independently arrived at. Considering the shoddy quality of *Wars*, though, I am forced to conclude that Marvel was merely trying to steal DC's thunder. Though Marvel saw much short-term benefits in the sales of secret wars, I feel they did more long term damage to their reputation. I know that I, for one, will be less likely to fall for their hype of "major changes" in the future.

While this is not a rave letter, I didn't think your request for letters was solely for praise, but for criticism as well. I do like your magazine enough to continue buying it and I do care enough about it to write this letter, if that means anything.

In closing, I hope your policy of concentrating on Marvel does not mean you will include only information favorable to Marvel. Fandom doesn't need another Marvel-hype magazine like *Marvel Age*. I'll stick around long enough to see if that's true at any rate.

Thanks,
Timothy S. Morizot
133 W. St. Elmo B-214
Austin, TX 78745

*Timothy—Saying that "creative juices are not flowing well at either major comic book company" in the November issue is not an unqualified endorsement of Marvel. Nor were my comments on various Marvel titles in PUBLISHER'S PICKS in the September issue. Stick around, CF is not about to become* Marvel Age *Jr.*

Dear Editor,

I have to say *COMICS FEATURE* does have a very heavy amount of coverage of Marvel Comics. This is understandable since you will sell more copies of your magazine by devoting more space to Marvel, since Marvel is the best-selling company. However, I do think you overdid it a bit this issue.

For instance, on the cover of this issue (38) you seemed to plaster old stock poses of all the most popular Marvel characters all over the place, even though some of these heroes were not even mentioned inside the mag. Okay, now I could understand the use of the 3 X-Men on the cover because of your *X-Factor* preview. . . and your Hero History of the Hulk justifies his appearance. Likewise the Walt Simonson interview gave you a good reason to use Thor.

But Spider-Man, the Wasp, the Human Torch, Daredevil, the Thing, the Scarlet Witch and Captain America? Don't you think that's a bit much? The only excuse I can think of for this is that since Stan Lee is now a regular contributor to CF, you wanted to have a representation of some of the most popular characters he's written. Still, the cover was very misleading.

I can forgive this sort of thing this

# LETTERS

time—after all, I'm as big a Marvel fan as the next guy—but don't let it happen again, otherwise people might think CF is just another house organ like *Marvel Age*. (I enjoy *Marvel Age*, but we don't need another mag which is an exact duplicate of it.)

Actually, you did have a few non-Marvel articles this ish—JUST TRY TO HAVE MORE VARIETY IN THE FUTURE. I'd especially like to see more on independent comics.

The feature news pages this issue I just skipped over, since I get all my news from *The Comics Buyer's Guide*. Maybe you ought to consider dropping your news pages. There's nothing there that can't be found elsewhere.

Despite my quibble about the over-emphasis on Marvel, I really did enjoy this issue. I look forward to more issues of CF in the future, especially at your new lower price. (Actually, it's not so bad that you feature only Marvel characters on your covers, since that gets people to buy the mag and then they can be exposed to other comic companies on the inside.)

Barry Dutter
Scotch Plains, NJ

*Barry—*

*I'm glad you noticed the non-Marvel pieces. You did hit it right on the head as to why we did the cover that way! I feel that it's a major event to add STAN LEE to the ranks of COMICS FEATURE and he did play a major role in creating every character on the cover!*

*Your comment on the news section is well-taken, but doesn't apply to most readers.*

*There is one other reason why the cover seems filled with characters in stock poses. The truth is—they are characters in stock poses. We lacked effective visuals for Thor and X-Factor (the Thor on the cover wouldn't have worked larger!) and went with what we had, an old Marvel ad pack!*

Dear Hal,

At $2.95 COMICS FEATURE was an after thought, but at $1.75 CF is a must buy!

With the new monthly status, I expect the news column will be expanded. Or, at least I hope so.

Okay! I admit it! I'm a Marvel Zombie!

Unlike COMICS COLLECTOR, CF really doesn't concern itself with comics and money. I suppose any issue now we'll be seeing a Price Guide insert.

Jim Wheeler has a nifty idea; an article on sword and sorcery comics. If you neglect a barbarian like Conan too often Hal, you'll never be able to hold your head up high—because it'll be rolling on the ground!

The Hulk article was nice, even though the Hulk is not!

Respectively,
Keith Drawbaugh
4003 Old Orchard Rd.
York, PA 17402

*Keith—*

*I'm glad you like the new, lower price. Rest assured we won't be adding in any price-guides. But certainly Mike Benton's FUN & PROFIT* deserves a home.

Dear Editor,

COMICS FEATURE will be a better magazine for the difference. I'm glad to see you lower the cover price. Hey, we can live without the color but we can't live without the information. Keep up the good work.

I know Marvel Comics is on top these days, but I think a newszine should be objective regardless, so don't ignore DC and the rest. I was interested in seeing Stan Lee's comments, but his regular column does for a fact more closely associate you with Marvel. That can be a problem, but if you give other publishers more space you can overcome the association, be fair, and make money.

The work Lee now does with the film industry sounds interesting enough. I have not seen the Daredevil and Lightning the Super Dog thing. . . when I saw this I said to myself, wow, Matt Murdock and a seeing eye dog, that's not even a bad idea. But hell, when Daredevil jumps out a window, he'll be fine. If the dog goes with him, as the dog does in the caption you reproduced in COMICS FEATURE, he'll be splattered all over the pavement soon. And wouldn't it be kind of suspicious looking if Daredevil had a seeing eye dog around??

*Why* do heroes in film and television *have* to have a sidekick and/or cute animal around all the time?? I think Lee answered that one, and if he continues to offer such insights, then the regular column will be worthwhile reading.

Cordially,
David Pettus
Rt 1, Box 301
Loretto, TN 38469

*David—*

*You like the new format, too. Good. Could you let me know what it is that Stan writes every issue that so ties COMICS FEATURE to Marvel? I'm really curious.*

Dear Editor,

I would really appreciate a personal reply to this if at all possible, and I've enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope for it.

My request is: Could you give me the address of Don Bluth Productions, creators of *The Secret of NIMH*? Also, how about an article in a future issue keeping us up to date on future projects from them, if any? In your November issue, in the ANIMATED ANTICS column, it seemed odd that *Secret* wasn't even mentioned when comparing *The Black Cauldron* to other recent animated feature films; only Bakshi was mentioned. Since it was *Cauldron* producer Joe Hale drawing the comparisons, and Don Bluth and company are partially ex-Disney, it does bring up the notion that maybe there are still hard feelings over their walkout from Disney. As for *Cauldron*, I haven't seen it yet, but I see where it already hasn't received very ecstatic reviews. It's been criticized for having characters with no depth, and excessive cuteness, especially with Gurgi. I've always admired *The Secret of NIMH* for managing to avoid such pitfalls.

Elsewhere in your November issue, the Hulk's history in the HEROES column was informative and entertaining but should have gone into greater detail. All in all, an excellent issue and I hope to hear from you soon.

David A. Leemhuis
RT. 3, 4475 W. Tyler Rd.
Hart, MI 49420

*David—*

*I am unable to personally reply but perhaps others would like to know the answer to this.*

*I cannot give the address of Don Bluth Productions or report on their future. The company has gone out of business, despite having a very creative staff. The company manufacturing their successful videogames went bankrupt owing Don Bluth millions in royalties, thus crippling his own company as well.*

Dear Sir,

Thanks for the article on breaking into comics in your December COMICS FEATURE.

I've always been interested in learning how to write comic books and your column with Stan the Man and the article with Jim Shooter really explained the ins and outs of writing a comic book.

Now for a little criticism. I think you feature Marvel & DC just a little too much. There are some excellent alternative comics out there that you could do an occasional story on. How about doing one story an issue on an alternative comic creator or comic?

I also enjoyed the rest of the December issue. The hero history of the Green Lantern, a character I'm not real familiar with, was well done. I also liked the Captain Marvel history and the excellent Mike Benton column especially.

Keep up the good work.

Vic Mordoh
P.O. Box 699
Ocala, Fla. 32678-0694

*Vic—*

*See, Mike. Some readers do like your work.*

*It does look like the number of letters is increasing. With any luck we'll be able to feature a monthly letters column. And don't forget the name-the-column contest—win a year's worth of COMICS FEATURE!*

# COMICS FEATURE

## ADVERTISING

**Classified**

Basic Rate: Minimum three lines at $5.00 per line. Limit 40 characters per line. Punctuation symbols and spaces count as characters.
Headline Catagories: Please specify catagory you want to be listed under. (For example: Marvels for sale, DC's to buy, Golden Age, etc.) First line only—underline words and they will be printed in bold caps.
Payment: Cash, check or money order must accompany ad order. Make checks payable to Movie Publishers Services Inc., 8399 Topanga Canyon Blvd. Suite 208, Canoga Park, Ca. 91304, (818) 340-4170.

**Display**

Camera-ready copy and payment required with order unless other arrangement are made with publisher or MPSI, Inc. All advertising orders are accepted subject to terms of our current rate card. All advertising is subject to the approval of the publisher and Movie Publishers Services, Inc. An add can be refused for any reason at the sole discretion of the publisher. Sending an ad is construed as acceptance of all rates and conditions under which advertising is sold at that time. Advertisers assume liability for all content (visual or written) and also assume responsibility for any claims arising made against the publisher or Movie Publishers Services Inc.'s the advertiser's responsibility to obtain appropriate releases for any item or individual pictured in their advertising. All agreements are subject to strikes, accidents, fire, acts of God or other contingencies beyond the publisher's or Movie Publishers Services Inc.'s control. Publisher's or Movie Publishers Services Inc.'s liability for any error shall not exceed the cost of the space occupied by the error. Mirrors are required before advertising is accepted. This magazine does not guarantee and disclaims all knowledge of the terms or guarantee of merchandise advertised. Publisher and Movie Publishers Services Inc. is not responsible for errors resulting from longhand copy or changes made by telephone. Advertising agencies please inquire. (Color Ads also available. Inquire at MPSI.)
Send all orders and checks to
Movie Publishers Services Inc.
8399 Topanga Canyon Blvd. Suite 208
Canoga Park, Ca. 91304 (818) 340-4170

Ad Rates

Display Ads

Prices are per issue

| | 1X | 3X | 6X | 12X |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| page— | $625 | $600 | $575 | $550 |
| 2/3 | $425 | $408 | | |
| 1/2 | $325 | $312 | $299 | $286 |
| 1/3 | $225 | $216 | $207 | $198 |
| 1/4 | $175 | $168 | $161 | $154 |
| 1/6 | $95 | $91 | $87 | $83 |
| 1/16 | $50 | $48 | $46 | $44 |
| 1/32 | $30 | $28 | $26 | $24 |

Movie Publishers Services Inc.,
8399 Topanga Canyon Blvd. Suite 208
Canoga Park, Ca. 91304
(818) 340-4170

# HEROES

BY WILL MURRAY

Stan Lee once boasted that his Fantastic Four were the first in the long parade of comic book superheroes to battle the forces of evil without benefit of costume. Whether he's correct or not might depend on how one chooses to define the word superhero. In any case, Lee's experiment lasted only until issue number three, when he caved in to reader demands and ordered artist Jack Kirby to design blue jumpsuits for the F.F. Lee had learned that comics fans enjoyed realism, but not at the exse of tradition. And the traditional superhero always wore something colorful.

It was a lesson that was lost on the folks over at the Dell Publishing Company, long a breeding pool for Disney and other licensed comics. Just about the time Lee was throwing in the towel, they turned out their version of an uncostumed superhero, the redoubtable Brain Boy.

Brain Boy was born in Dell's *Four Color* number 1330, one of the last issues of that company's all-purpose title inaugurated in 1939. Normally, *Four Color* was a vehicle for tv, film and licensed property adaptations. It was rare for the comic to feature an original property, never mind one that skated perilously close to concepts usually left to the competition. Perhaps by 1962, when the first *Brain Boy* comic appeared, Dell felt their venerable if static line needed a boost. Thus Brain Boy, the creation of an unknown writer and artist Gil Kane, working in a much more restrained style than he does today.

### A MARVEL BEFORE MARVEL

In some respects, Brain Boy could easily have been a Stan Lee creation. He was not far removed from the Cosmic- and Gamma-ray spawned characters that propelled Marvel to lofty heights in the early Sixties. Brain Boy was Matt Price, a blond young man who possessed incredible telepathic and psychokinetic powers. He was born that way. Matt's parents' car had crashed into a high tension power line, killing Matt's father. His mother received what should have been a fatal electrical charge but Mary Price survived and two months after the accident, Matt was born.

Matt's mental powers developed during his childhood. He discovered he could read minds, control people, levitate objects and even fly, after a fashion. But he learned the hard way that being different

HEY, HOLD IT, CHRIS! ALL YOU SAID ON THE PHONE WAS THAT I WAS IN FOR A COOL TIME!
VERY COOL! THE NORTH POLE! AND I'M NOT KIDDING!
CHRIS AMBERS OUTLINED THE CASE: TEN AMERICAN SCIENTISTS HAD DISAPPEARED WITHOUT A TRACE IN THE FROZEN WASTELAND NORTH OF THE TINY FRONTIER TOWN OF ANKOOK, JUMPING OFF SPOT FOR SEVERAL AMERICAN SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITIONS.
THIS IS THE FIRST TIME ANY OF OUR SCIENTISTS HAS EVER BEEN LOST, NOW TEN DISAPPEAR AT ONE TIME? IT'S FISHY, BRAIN BOY, IT DOESN'T ADD UP. HERE ARE PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE MISSING MEN.

brought trouble, so he hid his powers from others. In that sense, he might be called the first comic book mutant.

In the premier Brain Boy story, Matt is about to graduate from high school, an outwardly normal boy, when he encounters an older, less powerful telepath at his high school prom. Chris Ambers works for the U.S. Secret Service, in a department masquerading as the Society of Active Anthropologists. "The two-bit intelligence agency no one wants," as Ambers ruefully describes it. He recruits Matt, nicknaming him Brain Boy, to be his supersecret agent, to be used only for the most impossible assignments. His first mission is to find out what was going on in the South American republic of Xochtan, where a would-be dictator named Ricorta is attempting to take over the country.

Ricorta was a standard banana-republic dictator down to his swaggering military uniform and mustaches. He was also, in his way, as powerful a telepath as Matt Price. But he didn't possess the telekinetic abilities of his American counterpart. Matt succeeded in foiling Ricorta's master plan, but couldn't prevent him from becoming leader of Xochtan unless he wanted to kill him. He didn't, and later would regret sparing Ricorta's life. He did, however, manage to rescue the beautiful young Maria Irado from the dictator's clutches. Maria became Matt's girl friend of sorts. They spent most of the rest of the series going to high school graduation dances.

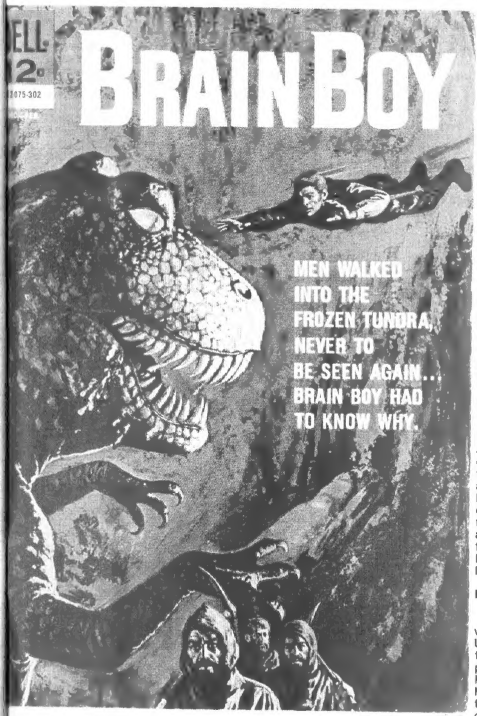
### IN HIS OWN BOOK

In the Spring of 1962, Brain Boy received his own comic book—but in typical Dell fashion, the first post-*Four Color* issue was numbered number two. He also got a new artist in the person of Frank Springer, whose realistic style went well with the unidentified writer's literate, no-nonsense scripts. In 1962, Springer was a long way from his future work on comics such as the equally-realistic **Secret Six**, or his unrealistic Phoebe Zeit-Geist serial done for **Evergreen Review** in the late Sixties. Some issues of **Brain Boy** looked to have been inked by Jack Sparling—for better or for worse.

Brain Boy's return engagement was with Ricorta again. The story—all **Brain Boy** issues featured a single 27-page story backed up by a five-page vignette featuring "The Strange Mr. Ozimandias," a sort of poor man's Dr. Strange—was a novel one for 1962. This time around, Ricorta was hijacking airliners. By the time Embers gets around to calling Matt Price into the case, Ricorta had nabbed 39 of them, flying the jets to an unknown central location after freeing the passengers. "Only intense government pressure kept the story out of the newspapers," the scriptwriter blandly assured his readers.

In any case, Matt's telepathy leads him to an about-to-be-hijacked plane and he goes along for the ride, hoping the hijacker will lead him to the culprit, and the other

# DELL'S SUPERHERO



planes. Matt ends up on a tiny Pacific island controlled by Ricorta. The island couldn't have been all that tiny, because it turns out all 40 jets are there, along with an army of ten thousand Xochians. Captured and given brain-deadening drugs by Ricorta, Brain Boy is told of the mad dictator's latest scheme: the jets are about to be sent out in flights of two, half of them disguised as Russian planes which will intrude upon U.S. airspace, the other half to penetrate Soviet skies. When challenged, they will open fire. Each side will assume a nuclear attack and counterattack. This was in the days before nuclear missile stockpiles. You might wonder what someone might gain from all this carnage, but Ricorta has that covered. He expects to emerge from his fallout shelter and conquer what's left of the planet with his private army. Obviously he never heard of nuclear winter.

But Brain Boy conveniently throws off the drugs that have dampened his mind and takes over Ricorta's will, mentally commanding two of the dictator's guards to execute him. Brain Boy doesn't stick around to watch, leaving the room as the burp of automatic weapons fire fills the corridor, later escaping the island confident that World War III has been averted and the menace of Ricorta is ended forever. For a cleancut teenager Ambers had found at a prom, Matt was pretty bloodthirsty.

### INTELLIGENT DINOSAURS

The next time around, Brain Boy tangled with a mysterious power that was luring U.S. scientists into the frozen wastes of the North Pole. He's puzzled because the people he encounters in a camp up there have strangely unreadable minds. Before he knows it, his mind goes blank and he's trudging through the snow answering the call of a mysteriously powerful telepath. He is drawn to an ice cave where zombie-like men are chipping away at something

frozen in the ice while a full-grown Tyrannosaurus Rex ambles around. Brain Boy, for once not living up to his nickname, dismisses the thunder lizard as an anomaly and not the source of the trouble because everyone knows that dinosaurs were brainless, right?

But it turns out that the Tyrannosaur is the giant brain. Thawed by atomic radiation, he's trying to free his fellow lizards from the ice so they can rule the world they once dominated. Turns out that of all the dinosaurs, Tyrannosaurs were the only ones with working intellects. Not only that, but they were telepaths, too! Brain Boy and the lizard, who calls himself Drax and calls Brain Boy "little chicken," have a climactic battle of wills. Brain Boy is an incisor away from becoming dinosaur food, but his human mind proves more potent, and he kills the lizard with a Herculean effort of will. Keeling over in death, Drax attempts to fall on top of Brain Boy, saying, "I . . . die. But you die under me, terrible chicken! I crush you with. . .my . .body!" proving that Tyrannosaurs are poor losers. Brain Boy flies to safety.

Next issue, Matt gets a vacation from telepathic enemies as he chases a time traveler from the present to the Old West to ancient Spain and the Egypt of the Pharaohs and back to the present again, almost becoming a mummy in the process. The time traveler, Ellis Bly, is looting the ages with a stolen time machine. Bly dies at the hands of a wronged Pharoah and Matt accidently causes the time machine to be destroyed.

Issue number five, which clearly shows the Jack Sparling touch, was called "The Metal People," and it was an atmospheric story about mysterious killing on the Xochitan/Taxana border. The creative team spent more than half the issue building up the suspense, never showing the mysterious bulletproof marauders. They might as well have saved their trouble. The cover gave the whole show away. It showed Brain Boy—wearing the khaki clothes which were his standard cover apparel—swooping down upon the archdictator Ricorta while bulbous robots on caterpillar treads blazed away. The cover blurb read: "Ricorta is back. . . with an army of 500,000 robots!"

The number wasn't exaggerated either. Ricorta intends to conquer neighboring Taxana with his metallic hordes and then resume his world-conquering plans. But first he wants to kill Matt Price, who had defeated and nearly killed him twice before. Matt learns that he shouldn't have left the room after ordering Ricorta's assassination. The telepathic dictator had simply used his own mind control abilities to force his soldiers to turn their weapons on one another.

This time around, Brain Boy doesn't win tthrough application of his mental powers. Instead, he brainstorms an acid that will eat away at the superalloy that makes Ricorta's robots indestructable. U.S. bombers inundate the marching robot army with the stuff and they are slagged. Among them, apparently, Ricorta himself. This time he's dead for good.

### THE END OF THE LINE

Or maybe not. We'll never know for certain because the next issue of *Brain Boy* was also the last. A variation of the dinosaur story, Brain Boy goes on vacation to a nice resort where every one is mindlessly content, and a little too eager to get Matt to jump into Blue Lake, which for some strange reason is green. This time Brain Boy doesn't suspect telepathic Tyrannosaurs, although the clues are all the same. Instead, it turns out that the lake itself is the problem. Or to be more precise, the microscopic creatures who infest the lake and give it that weird green coloring, are responsible. The creatures, collectively known as the Eerown, have come to earth in a big black ball and together comprise one gigantic communal intelligence. Anyone drinking or bathing in Eerown-infested water becomes their slave.

It happens to Matt when he goes for his first dip in Blue Lake, but his superior mind is able to shrug off the insidious influence. Fighting through the other slaves, who don't want anything to happen to the Eerown, Brain Boy beats the menace with an adaptation of a common household accident. He throws a plugged-in radio into the lake, electrocuting the Eerown. Blue Lake becomes blue once more and the human slaves return to normal not remembering a thing. And Brain Boy? He falls asleep from exhaustion muttering something about "...No more vacation for me. . .too dangerous. . ."

### DO CLOTHES MAKE THE . . .

Brain Boy was a very realistic series, which was its charm and probably its downfall. Most of the time, cover artist notwithstanding, Matt Price ran around in a white shirt and blue pants, which was his "uniform" of sorts. For some reason, every comics character who doesn't wear a costume seems to feel a need to wear the same clothes day in and day out. It was no different with Brain Boy. He was not a very physical hero, either. Matt seldom threw punches. Most of his activities were limited to reading minds, mentally controlling people and other impossible-to-draw-with-drama phenomena. He did sometimes fly, but not like Superman. Matt levitated, something he did with difficulty, sweat forming on his brow and complaints forming in his thought balloons. "Whew, this is the hardest work I know!" he thought during his longest recorded flight, in issue number four. "I'd much rather walk. . . but I've got to find Bly, FAST!" As a kid, I most enjoyed that part of Brain Boy's repertory—it made flying seem almost possible—but mostly he used it to handle the stairs leading up to Chris Amber's office when he reported for his assignments.

The chief charm of *Brain Boy* lay in its novelty and literate scripts. I don't know who wrote *Brain Boy*, but he was clearly a man ahead of his time, anticipating airline hijackings, theorizing that dinosaurs were more intelligent than believed at the time (something scientists now suggest was the case) and, if you want to stretch things a bit, predicting toxic waste pollution in his Eerown story. I'm still waiting for the first time machine. Still, Brain Boy had a lot of potential. A mutant, with some minor relevancy in Matt's interracial romance with Maria Irado, and a compelling need to keep his powers a secret (which slipped a bit in later issues), he seemed to have possessed most of the ingredients that made for a successful Sixties superhero. Had he been handled differently, he might have lasted more than six issues. But Dell went out of its way to make him seem not like a superhero, although they cheated a little on the covers. Every one showed him in flight. As it was, *Brain Boy* slipped out of existence barely a month or two before those other gifted teenagers, the *X-Men*, first showed their mutant faces. Obviously, Brain Boy lacked a certain indefinable ingredient that, had he possessed it, would have guaranteed his survival in the four-color world.

Do you suppose it was the way he dressed? CF

DELL
15¢
01-079-209
JULY-SEPT.

# BRAIN BOY

BRAIN BOY STOOD BETWEEN THE MAD DICTATOR AND HIS DREAM OF WORLD WAR III...BUT TIME WAS RUNNING OUT!

# COMICS FEATURE

## Subscribe TODAY

Comic books, animation, newspaper strips, superhero role-playing games—Like no other magazine, COMICS FEATURE covers it all. Written exclusively by professionals, printed on the best paper and loaded with full, vibrant color, COMICS FEATURE is truly unique. COMICS FEATURE is the only magazine that's universally trusted by the creators, publishers and producers of comic and animation art to accurately and fairly report on their activities.

Movie Publishers Services, Inc. Suite 208 8399 Topanga Canyon Blvd. Canoga Park, CA 91304

Please send me 9 issues of **COMICS FEATURE** for the ridiculously low price of $15.95, $24.95 in Canada, and $24.95 foreign.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____

STATE_____

ZIP_____

Please pay by check or money order—do not send cash! (Please allow checks to clear our bank)

MPS

MOVIE PUBLISHERS SERVICES INC.

ALLOW 8 TO 10 WEEKS FOR DELIVERY